JULY
Weird Tales
ANC
25¢
It was magic
It was dynamite!
HELL'S BELLS
by
Duncan H.
Munro
WHICH'S
WITCH?
by
Harold
Lawlor

Reducing Specialist Says: LOSE WEIGHT Where It Shows Most — REDUCE MOST ANY PART OF THE BODY WITH

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Spot Reducer

Relaxing • Soothing Penetrating Massage

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FOR GREATEST BENEFIT IN REDUCING by massage use Spot **REDUCER** with or without electricity—Also used as an aid in the relief of pains for which massage is indicated.

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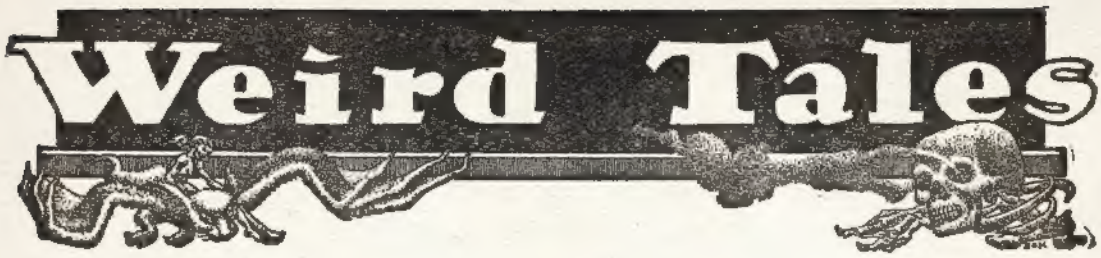

JULY, 1952 Cover by Jon Arfstrom

HELL'S BELLS . . . . . Duncan H. Munroe 8
A lingering relic of a forgotten age whose sciences today would seem as so much priestly magic.

WHICH'S WITCH? . . . . . Harold Lawlor 21
Even a syndicated columnist can't afford to treat witchcraft with flippancy.

THE EMPEROR'S LETTER . . . . . David Eynon 31
One way to record history; each man a frozen page to show the way he died.

ELMER BITTERSNITT AND THE THREE BEARS . . . . Harry Botsford 35
One could certainly understand why Elmer was allergic to honey—clover honey especially.

THERE WAS SOOT ON THE CAT . . . . . Suzanne Pickett 47
I was the only one who had read the diary; I, too, had seen the cat with the awful eyes; and I had felt the horror emanating from the house.

THE GREEN PARROT . . . . . Joseph Brennan 52
A pheasant or a woodcock or a hawk might have flapped across the road; but a large green parrot, in New England, late in November. . . !

THE TEMPLE OF SERPENTS . . . . . Paul Ernst 56
"I am about to make a wish, and may the devils that hide in the dark places see to it that my wish comes true. . . ."
(Copyright 1928 Popular Fiction Publishing Company)

THE PLAID . . . . . Abrach 64
In some strange way it seemed as if the child completed the glen; without her it could be naught.

LIVE EVIL . . . . . Emil Petaja 69
All sorts of machines are being invented daily, hourly—why not a deghosting machine?

THE LAKES OF NAI LOODIE . . . . . Donald F. Vieweg 77
The story of a strange goddess with red eyes and blue skin who was the incarnate spirit of a glacier—well, that didn't help one to keep things in proper perspective.

VERSE
ALETHIA PHRIKODES . . . . . H. P. Lovecraft 43
BLACK CANDLES . . . . . Yetza Gillespie 51

THE EYRIE 4

A WEIRDUTATION . . . . . Joseph Howard Krucher 55

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178
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D. McILWRAITH, *Editor*

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Cry
Just One More Chance
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Jealousy
Shrimp Boats
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Alabama Jubilee
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Faith Of Our Fathers
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Jesus Keep Me Near The Cross
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Dear Lord And Father Of Mankind
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The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Picking up the May, 1952, issue of WEIRD TALES *was like picking up a copy printed in your Golden Age. The Virgil Finlay cover was fine—and it was Virgil Finlay.*

*In all ways, except one, a memorable issue.**

I don't think McClusky has written as good a story as "The Lamia in the Penthouse" since the memorable story in 1938 called "The Crawling Horror." I rather liked the unusual way it was told.

The description of the building which the Lamia inhabits rather amused me, because I work in an office building painfully similar.

Almost exactly the same: "It was an old place with iron fire-escapes zigzagging across the front, about eight stories tall." And it has a "silent lobby with cracked marble and plaster walls" and "checkerboard marble floor" and a "rickety open-grill elevator."

It is a very interesting building (whose location and name I hesitate to name) and said to be "The biggest eyesore in Philadelphia." The outside of the building is all carving and frieze work, all rough and unfinished. At one corner, for example, is the large, smooth-shaven face of an Indian. This was not originally, so I have learned, an Indian. It was once the face of a Norseman with a big, bristly beard. When the beard had become slightly cracked and unsightly the whole thing had to be re-chiseled. The result was that part of the beard became a

(*Continued on page* 7)

NOW, the pipe smoker's dream come true!

Every Pipeful Proves . . .

DR. PHILIP'S PIPE IS THE BEST!

The ideal pipe for the STEADY SMOKER, the NEW SMOKER and the man who doesn't like an ordinary pipe.

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This cross section shows the interchangeable inner ceramic bowl which burns tobacco dry, cool and clean. The bowl acts as a non-burning sponge that absorbs all of the tar and most of the nicotine. The metal radiator ring on top of the Dr. Philip's pipe is the only part that can get hot. It takes the heat from the ceramic and gives it off to the air FAST. The smoke circulates in the space between the inner bowl and the outer briar shell, becoming COOL before you draw it. Your tobacco cannot get wet because cotton or paper tissue packed in the space below the inner bowl absorbs all of the saliva and condensation. Rotate the ceramic bowls over and over again as you would a set of ordinary pipes. Dr. PHILIP'S pipe is EASY to CLEAN. There is no need to knock this pipe against any object to get out the ash. It does not form a cake. There is no need to rest the Dr. PHILIP'S pipe for cooling or drying. It has a constant capacity. The SHORT SMOKE MODEL will hold enough tobacco for a pleasure packed smoke of 15 to 25 minutes and the LONG SMOKE MODEL will last from 45 minutes to a full hour!

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(Sorry, no C.O.D.'s) 6-52

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The Eyrie

(*Continued from page 4*)

necklace of bear-claws and the Viking helmet became feathers.

The building has very extensive cellars. They wind in and out in all directions so that it would be quite easy to get lost for a short time in them. In one place in the cellar are numerous vaults, row on row, with heavy iron doors closed with combination locks. Some of these doors are opened and used by the somewhat laconic janitor as storage spaces. Other of the vaults are locked and have been locked for more than half a century.

And—the building has a tower, a penthouse. *In one corner of the office on the eighth floor is the door leading up to it. No one has been up into the tower for years. No one except me.*

One lunch hour I ate quickly, donned a pair of faded dungarees and an old shirt, and began explorations. I forced open the door and found a winding iron stairing that went around a post. This I followed upward coming upon double doors that opened on a balcony. I went out onto it, marveling at the huge, stone gargoyle that hung over it. Then I returned to the winding way, my shoulders brushing who knows how long undisturbed dust from the walls until I came to a room. A small, square room littered with cases, and papers, and scattered books. Then I went up the stairs farther, came upon another room containing much the same thing. After which I went back down for an afternoon's work, but some day I'm going to write a story called "The Lamia in the Penthouse!"

Dave Hammond,
Runnemede, New Jersey.

*We'd like to know the one way excepted! —Editor, WEIRD TALES.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

No doubt your readers find many different reasons for liking the stories in WEIRD TALES. *Some think the story must take place in a far-off exotic land, or the persons involved in fantastic situations. Personally, I liked the short story by Curtis Casewit namely "The Mask" in the March issue of* WEIRD TALES. *The European atmosphere appealed to me, especially Vienna, for, although one has not seen it, still by the spirit one feels a familiarity with it. The characters are normal enough, as well as their way of life, gives the ending a special wallop. With the familiar, Casewit seems to be able to bring a fresh outlook.*

Two other stories that impressed me with their goodly supply of weird situations were "Morne Perdu," a story of hopeless terror, by Alice Farnham, and "The Scarred Soul" by Seabury Quinn. The latter had enough of the plausible in it to make the story more terrifying.

Ruth Schmidt,
Lincoln, Ill.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I am wondering if you might have a green hide, 30cm purple horns, a 70cm red tail, and yellow-shaped eyes placed in a real fantasy-type body. Whatever you are, I must say that it would be difficult for me to picture an ordinary human working on the material that goes into* WEIRD TALES.

The city of Waco is a SF desert, so I would like to correspond with some fan so I can do a little "shoptalking" and get in on the hot news. I really would like to get in touch with a fan with an Ampro Model 730 (or later) tape recorder. Perhaps this type of notice will get a rise:

Bryan J. Ogburn, 19, of 1005 South 7th Street, Waco, Texas, would like to begin correspondence, recorded on tape, with another SF fan. My machine, an Ampro Model 730, operates at a fixed speed of 3.66 inches per second with two track, A-winding, 6mm, magnetic recording tape. All Ampro recorders operate at that same speed.

A tape fantasy club would be interesting; that medium of correspondence would provide for a fast exchange of news and comments. Anyone interested?

Bryan J. Ogburn, IV,
Waco, Texas.

*We spend our days trying to be as ordinary as possible.—Editor, WEIRD TALES.

(*Continued on page 93*)

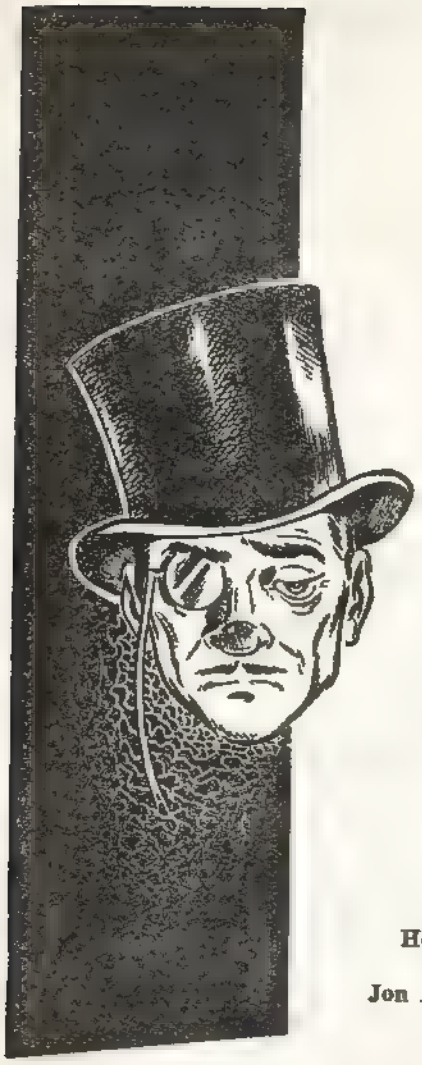
HELL'S BELLS

By Duncan H. Munro

It was the key to an invisible door; It was magic; It was dynamite!

THE thing was a silver sistrum wrought by hands long vanished in the dust. It was a lingering relic of a deep buried and almost forgotten age when the sciences that were known were not the sciences of today—and the sciences of today were unknown.

In this sense, the sistrum was as much a



Heading by Jon Arfstrom

scientific instrument as an earthquake-diviner's seismograph or a water-diviner's hazel twig. It was the key to an invisible door. It was a tuning-fork capable of subtle vibrations linking extra-vibratory worlds. It could create contact and all that contact entailed. It was dynamite.

Bentley, of course, knew nothing of this and would not have believed it anyway. To his modern mind, the sciences of the past were as much priestly magic as the sciences of today would seem to ancient practitioners. Indeed, he doubted whether the sistrum predated last Christmas, and his interest in it was solely due to the fact that it was of genuine native manufacture. Definitely it was not one of those alleged playthings of the Pharoahs such as certain factories send Egyptwards by the shipload.

"Nice little curio," he commented, moderating his enthusiasm to bring eighty percent off the price. "How much do you want for it?"

"By my father and my mother," said Old Abbas, stroking his long and exceedingly dirty beard, "it is a treasure unique. The like of it rests not within the confines of Al Azhar where, as thou knowest, reposes all earthly wisdom. Neither hath one of its kind been fingered even by the pious and mighty Abdul ben Hassan es Senussi himself." His bloodshot eyes crawled cunningly over Bentley's impeccable white ducks, noted his expensive wrist-watch and ring.

"How much, you mummified pirate?"

"Eternal shame be upon me and all my house that I should dispose of so precious a jewel as if 'twere common merchandise. Indeed would I be a *nitt'n kelb* to mention it in the same breath with filthy money." Old Abbas spread soiled hands with long, pickpocket fingers. "I will give it to the handsome American tourist, for the sheer joy of giving." He smiled benevolently. "And a mere two hundred piastres."

"Jeepers!" said Bentley. "I'll give you ten."

"Ten miserable piastres?" Abbas was astounded. "Ten poor coins representing a blind man's alms?" Abbas was incredulous. "Surely you jest with me." He gazed with pain and sorrow up the narrow way of the Souk-el-Fatouma. Somewhat incongruously, a street car rocked along the Sharia Shereef Pasha at the other end. "May I be smeared with the fat of swine did I blaspheme the holiness of this relic by taking one petty milleme less," declared Old Abbas. "One hundred eighty piastres."

"I'll meet you halfway," countered Bentley. He gestured to emphasize the sheer generosity of his offer. "Twelve."

"Twelve?" echoed Abbas hollowly. "Did I hear twelve? Are my aged ears accursed?" He rocked to and fro as he squatted on his heels. "I am an honest man. I ask honest prices. Ali, of the blood of the Prophet, be my witness that because I ask honest prices I have never been known to reduce them—never!" He killed a louse. "One hundred fifty."

"Fifteen," suggested Bentley, hard of heart.

"Fifteen! Am I of imbecilic countenance

that the handsome American should make mock of me? Did my venerable father beget a *roufahdiah*? Am I dung to be trod over by a milkless goat and be sniffed over by dogs? Think thou that I should treat a potent jewel of the centuries as if 'twere a footling Cypriot potsherd?" He spat in the dust, lavishly and with vim. "*Amshi!* Ere I sacrifice one further tittle or jot may the perfume of Paradise be as the stink of a camel at the setting of the sun!"

With a resigned shrug, Bentley put down the sistrum and turned to go. He squeezed into an open doorway to permit an overloaded donkey to pass. The donkey could not be seen. All that was visible was an extremely fat and solemn Persian seated cross legged upon a tremendous mound of gaily colored bags beneath which four tiny legs staggered along.

Abbas heaved a profound sigh. "Observe the toiling ass. Is not his load far lighter than mine? One hundred."

"Twenty piastres," said Bentley.

"It is of no moment." Abbas changed his tactics, lolled back with the abandoned air of one who has no urgent appointments before next Friday week. "Of what consequence is worldly wealth in the precious hereafter? Of none whatever! May my name as a bargainer be more odorous than the catacombs of Mex if I hock the power of the ages for a beggar's *baksheesh!*" He spat again. "Eighty piastres."

"Twenty-five." Bentley picked up the sistrum again.

"Seventy."

"Twenty-five piastres and fifty millemes."

"The Sword of Islam be my guardian and protector—now he comes down to millemes!" Abbas tore at his beard. "Sixty."

"Thirty," said Bentley.

Abbas squatted and rocked and muttered a cogent passage from the Book of Al Forkran. Then he stared prayerfully at the sky. After a while he muttered a lot more words which were not in the Book of Al Forkran. The mildest of them made reference to persons born in comfort stations.

A NATIVE woman drifted past like a drab ghoul, her sloe eyes glowing over the edge of her *yashmak*. The eyes registered awe as they saw the mumbling Abbas, then ran appreciatively over Bentley's trim, white-clad figure.

"Fifty," decided Abbas, surrendering his heart's blood.

"Forty-five."

"It is generous of you," said Abbas. "I accept—fifty-four."

"You've got it bassackwards. I said forty-five."

Abbas managed to sigh and groan at the same time. "So be it. Pay me quickly, in piastres, before they turn to millemes." His hand was an eager claw as it took the money. He said, "I have been as a father to thee. I have been as a sparkling fountain at the end of a long, long day. Let grace beget grace, as the Prophet commanded." He thrust the money somewhere in his filthy burnous. "Alaham is thine—for a while. Much good may he do you. Be warned: do not release the bells except in solitude!"

Bentley had another look at the sistrum. It was a tiny silver cross, its bottom arm forming a handle, its top arm shaped in an oval loop. Three metal cords stretched across the loop, each with a curiously shaped midget bell dangling from its center. The bells were not free to swing: somebody had tethered them with a length of ordinary string.

"Why not?" he inquired.

"I have told thee—let it suffice." Abbas lay back exhausted by the day's business. He closed his eyes, half-opened one, grunted, "Be warned!" and closed it again.

FOR three months the sistrum lay neglected and forgotten among other small souvenirs while Bentley finished with Egypt, did a tour of Europe which eventually brought him to London. He had a small apartment there; it had long been his home from home on frequent business trips from New York. He rediscovered the sistrum when unpacking and, more as an excuse for a gabfest than anything else, took it around to show Pearson who always had been interested in Egyptian junk.

"Bought it in Cairo," he explained. "From a louse-ridden old robber named Abbas the Ancient. He wrapped it in the usual air of mystery and soaked me forty-five."

"A true ankh," declared Pearson, mildly

enthusiastic as he studied it. "An out-of-the-ordinary one too—see?" He pointed to the end of the handle.

"A dog's face," said Bentley. "What of it?"

"It's a jackal's head, not a dog's. It's the head of Anubis, Lord of the Other World—if there is another." He touched the haltered bells. "Dainty little jobs, those. First one I've seen with bells," He put it down. "Have a whiskey?"

"Thanks." Bentley shoved the sistrum into a pocket.

He was on a street car crossing Lambeth Bridge before his mind came back to the dog-faced dingus. Taking it from his pocket he toyed with it, juggled it around, picked at its string in the aimless manner of one whose fingers just have to be occupied by something. The string came loose after a while, releasing the bells.

Giving the sistrum a gentle experimental waggle, Bentley listened. The miniature chimes sounded faint but sweetly like camel bells in the cool of a purple dawn. They had a peculiar quality of penetration as if somehow sounding on and on and on into the faraway. From some eerie dimension equally distant there seemed to come a response like the clamor of a mighty gong.

Then a fat woman screamed for aid from several saints and a person named Samuel and fought her way to the exit. Ten other passengers beat her to it. They emerged with all the leisurely grace of Zoo patrons who've found a tiger on the loose, leaving Bentley alone with his sistrum and the apparition.

The vision stood blinking at Bentley as if just awakened from the slumber of a thousand years. Bentley bleared back imitatively. The newcomer looked solid enough, substantial beyond doubt. He had black, piercing eyes set in a thin, aquiline face which bore a queer mixture of expressions, submissive and saturnine. His very tall form had the smooth lines of a bronze statue. His garments were as outlandish as they were scant. His headgear was an enormous confection of crimson velvet, gold lace and seed pearls.

"Behold," commanded this character. "I am Alaham, the son of Alaham, the son of Alaham, the son of—"

"Alaham," suggested Bentley brightly.

"No," corrected the other. "The son of Al."

"Ah!" said Bentley. "Al!"

"If the holder of the singing-key does not yet wish to return it and permit me to close the door, then"—he made a resigned gesture—"I must serve him lest worse befall."

"How?" asked Bentley, becoming interested.

"I shall see that thy thirst is slaked, thy belly filled, thy ears soothed with sweet music, thy soul laved with the poetry of Ibrahim the Bard of Al Khali, thine every desire satisfied." Then he qualified it with, "So far as lies within the power of my kind."

Bentley let his eyes drift to the window, conscious that his vehicle was now running in one spot. A crowd had gathered on the sidewalk, peering intently at the motionless street car, listening to the shrill complaints of the fat lady. In a minute or two it would cease to be a crowd, become a mass meeting. In front the driver was stymied by bodies on the tracks. Another street car had pulled up close behind, its bell clanging urgently, its driver not quoting the Book of Al Forkran.

There is no law against conversing with a djinn in a Route Nine car. There is no law prohibiting djinni from following the bare midriff fashion or wearing three-foot hats. But a London bobby could soon make a case of it. Creating an obstruction upon the King's highway; behaving in a manner calculated to cause a breach of the peace. Or something like that.

"For mercy's sake," said Bentley, "get me out of this, somewhere around the corner, out of sight of this lot."

"Master, it is done." Very much in the grand manner, Alaham swept a potent hand.

Swoosh! There was a rush of wind, the whole world swept around in kaleidoscopic patterns then fell back into shape. Bentley found himself on the sidewalk face to face with an overdressed woman who was clinging to a length of plaited cord. At the other end of the cord dangled a pop-eyed, yelping pekinese.

"Right under my nose," she said haughtily. "You pop up right under my nose and

scare the life out of my Precious. What an uncouth person! Have you no manners?"

"Lady," began Bentley, raising his right hand for no reason at all. The bells on the sistrum chimed obediently.

"Master, you summoned Alaham?"

PRECIOUS did a frantic half-circle dangle at the full stretch of his cord and groaned deep down in his insides. His mistress took in what there was of Alaham's ensemble, let go a couple of high yips and departed at top velocity. Precious half-ran, half-floated behind her like a rag on the tail of a kite.

"Master?"

"Look here," demanded Bentley, "what does it? Is it this?" He indicated the sistrum.

"Of course, Master. With that ankh you may call upon the powers behind the ankh." To simplify it still further, he added, "The key to a house is the key to a house."

Another crowd was beginning to assemble, one or two of them shrewdly deducing from Bentley's accent that his companion was the first new-style zoot-suiter to be seen in England. Bentley was not overjoyed by the publicity. Best thing to do was muffle those infernal bells until he could cope with the matter in privacy.

Shoving his hand with the sistrum into a pocket, he gripped the bells, said to Alaham, "Scram!"

"Pardon, thy servant's gift of tongues—"

"Beat it!" yelped Bentley, watching the mob grow.

Making a mystic wave in the air, Alaham plucked out of nothingness a long, thin length of bamboo. He swished it, made it go *whoo-whoo,* stared around belligerently.

"Beat whose?" he asked, the whose what being understood. Licking his lips, he made the bastinado go *whoo-whoo* again. Several spectators vainly tried to retreat against the pressure of those behind them.

"I meant go!" swore Bentley, still clinging to the bells. "Begone!"

Pouf! The tall, bellicose figure of Alaham snuffed out abruptly. The crowd gauped at resulting emptiness, then at the perspiring Bentley. One and all conceded it was the most convincing trick yet pulled by any street magician. They stayed put, hoping for something even better before he came round with the hat.

With a worried frown, he pushed through them, started to walk rapidly down the street. Most of them followed. At each corner a few more joined the procession on general principles.

Bentley looked backward several times. It lent his progress an air of furtiveness and guilt which encouraged passers-by to join the throng. Several eyed him, about-turned, tailed the procession in anticipation of mayhem or anything equally juicy. Before long he'd have half London behind him —and he was getting fed up.

ROUNDING a corner into a quiet alleyway, he used his momentary solitude to give the bells an urgent ring.

"Yes, Master?"

"Get me home," breathed Bentley, watching the corner.

"Home?" Alaham was sorrowful, apologetic. "Master, it could be done except that thy servant does not know the location of thine abode."

"Oh, blazes!" snapped Bentley, feeling desperate.

"Yes, Master." Alaham produced a leaping fire upon his hand, offered it graciously.

"Take it away! Put it out!" Mopping his forehead, Bentley saw the advance guard of the pursuit turn into the alley. A murmur of anticipation came with them. Behind them, a long gleaming automobile slid silently down the street. It gave him an idea. "Get me a car."

"Car?" Alaham was puzzled. The leading trio of trackers reached them, came to a full stop, noses quivering with curiosity. Alaham glanced at them in open disdain.

"A carriage," urged Bentley. "A means of transport."

"Of course, Master." Alaham's eyes lit up with relieved pleasure. He waved an all-powerful hand.

Bentley moaned low down in his chest, "Oh, suffering snakes!"

One of the onlookers said, "Cripes!"

Another added, "Jer-*u*-salem!"

The miraculously produced conveyance was a flamboyant sedan-chair. Rich purple drapes hung in heavy folds between its intricately carved corner posts which were

topped by coiled cobras, gilded, with ruby eyes. A gigantic Nubian waited between the forward shafts, another between the rearward. On either side posed an armed guard in the shape of a pair of swarthy, turbaned parties with piratic eyes and large scimitars.

"Enter, Master," invited Alaham, making an imperious sweep which removed the derby hat from a fat kibitzer.

Licking his lips, Bentley looked at the crowd which now filled the alley. They mooned back with a mixture of respect and stupefaction. Behind them, a couple of blue-clad bobbies were trying to bull their way through.

Making up his mind, Bentley thrust aside the purple drapes, entered the contraption, sank back on a deeply upholstered seat. Alaham shoved a brown, sinuous arm through the drapes, carefully placed upon the opposite seat a small box fronted with bamboo bars. The box contained a couple of frantically writhing serpents.

"Suffering snakes," he reminded pridefully.

"Get rid of 'em, for Pete's sake," yelped Bentley.

The obedient and literal-minded Alaham snatched them back, surveyed the crowd and inquired, "Which one of you is Pete?"

At that point the cops arrived. The sedan-chair did not faze them any. They had seen too many weird contraptions being dragged around by visiting dignitaries from abroad. Only last week, for instance, there had been the Siwa of M'Abula and his twenty-foot umbrella. In their logic, anyone with a contraption must be a dignitary of sufficient mass and albedo to have a clear orbit. So they shooed the crowd.

"Beat it! Ain't you got no manners? G'wan, don't argue—get a move on!" One stepped off the curb, officiously signalled the sedan-chair to proceed upon its lawful business.

"Take me to Marylebone," whispered Bentley through the purple drapes.

"Indeed, Master, thy servant knows it not."

"Carry on up the street," Bentley rasped. "I'll tell you when to turn."

He heard a gabble of instruction in some spitting language that was not Arabic. The sedan-chair lifted, moved forward, swaying rhythmically as it went along. Lifting the drapes a fraction of an inch, he saw one of the guards marching at his side, scimitar on shoulder. Stubborn remnants of the crowd were keeping pace along the sidewalk.

"Darn 'em!" He let the drapes drop.

Resting back, he stared at the patch of sky visible through the open roof, wondered what the regal occupant was supposed to do when it rained. A taxi whirled past, a hoarse Cockney voice bawled something about it being more usual to carry them horizontal. Taking no notice, Bentley continued to stare moodily at the sky. The sedan jolted to a stop.

Cautiously peering out again, he found his cavalcade held up by cross-traffic at an intersection. The accompanying audience likewise had stopped. It had lined up on the sidewalk, staring like buffalo at the first railroad locomotive.

AS HE looked, an elegantly attired individual edged through the ranks. He sported a glossy high hat, had a carnation in his buttonhole, and terminated his fetching ensemble with lavender spats. Fixing a monocle in his eye, this character surveyed the sedan chair and its colorful attendants, ejaculated, "Begad!" and dropped the monocle.

Picking it up from the end of its black silk cord, he screwed it into his face again. The eye behind it was just as glassy and somewhat codlike. The eye wandered over the spectacle once more, suddenly met Bentley's peeping through the purple hangings.

"Going my way?" inquired High-Hat, thumbing a lift on the spur of the moment. He had the air of one who frequently used the spur of the moment to save numbing thought.

To Bentley's mind, this was companionship in a crisis.

Sticking a hand through the drapes, he crooked an inviting forefinger. Trouble shared was trouble spared.

High-Hat delightedly repeated, "Begad!" and stepped off the sidewalk. The next instant he flung himself flat in the road and thus avoided prompt decapitation. The scimitar of Right Hand Pirate fairly

whistled as it clove the atmosphere above him.

Frantically rolling to avoid a second swipe, High-Hat protested, "Dash it, I've been invited."

"Sufty cuss!" howled Right Hand Pirate. Raising the heavy sword far above his turbaned head, he brought it down with all this might. By a remarkable feat of acrobatics, High-Hat shot off the road, through the drapes and into the sedan with no more than an inch to spare. Too late Right Hand Pirate struggled to arrest his weighty weapon. Of its own momentum it swept on, sliced cleanly through the root of the right hand forward shaft.

That caused the front Nubian to turn and pass remarks about phoney wedding certificates, or so it sounded. Right Hand Pirate muscled up in readiness to cast back aspersions when Alaham chipped in.

"Forward, fools!"

The sedan tilted as the front bearer lifted his single shaft and lugged ahead. The one at the back lifted and pushed cooperatively. With the murmuring audience still in attendance, the procession moved grandly and ponderously on.

Dusting himself with a silk handkerchief, High-Hat said, *"Ultima ratio regum."* He sighed deeply, applied the silk to his brilliant shoes and lavender spats. "In the midst of life we are in death. By jove, sir, I rolled like a hog in the sort of stuff hogs roll in. I have brought the ancient line into bad odor." He pressed a well-manicured hand on a corner-post to hold himself against the tilt. "Somewhat of a list to starboard, isn't there?"

"We've lost a shaft," Bentley informed.

"Indeed? Too bad—but it was that or my pate." He polished his hat on a sleeve. "It's bally good of you to give me a lift, sir. Never been in one of these things before. What is it, if I may be so vulgar as to ask?"

"Some sort of sedan-chair. I got it from a djinn."

"Stap me, a djinn?" Carefully wiping his monocle, he stuck it in one eye, stared at Bentley glassily. "I thought they existed only in the movies. Well, well, one lives and learns. Did you get him out of a bottle?"

"No." Bentley exhibited the sistrum, keeping the bells locked in his fingers. "I bought this in Cairo. He comes when I ring for him."

"You don't say!" He gaped at the bells, added, "Ring him for me, there's a good fellah."

"I am Alaham."

High-Hat turned the monocle upon the lean, saturnine face which had thrust through the drapes. He said, "My word, that was swift. You'd be a sensation in a bar." He adjusted the monocle more precisely. "My name is Montmorency."

"And," continued Alaham, pointedly ignoring Montmorency, "I am not a djinn." His stare at Bentley was one of cold reproof. "Neither am I an afreet. There are no such things. They are no more than the foolish fancies of itinerant tale-tellers. I am *real.*"

"Really?" put in Montmorency, unabashed. "Then what are you?"

"I am Alaham."

"Ah!" said Montmorency, "that's different." He grabbed at a post as the sedan made an alarming lurch. "Yoicks! We're making more motion sidewise than forward. It does things to one's chitlings. I say, old boy, can't you give us something speedier than this?"

Alaham looked inquiringly at Bentley, who responded with, "Yes, if you can provide something faster, for pity's sake let's have it."

"Master, it is done," recited Alaham, his eyes glowing at Montmorency's glass one.

FROM the top of his tall, stone column Nelson had gazed down upon Trafalgar Square and seen many a lordly procession, many a martial parade, but never such a spectacle as this. Buses skidded, automobiles scattered, taxi-drivers oathed mightily as this crazy invader charged headlong across the area.

Bentley clung for dear life to a handy side-rail while the four-horse chariot plunged hell-for-leather onward with total disregard of all traffic rules. His monocle miraculously remaining fixed in position, Montmorency reposed full length on the bottom of the bucking vehicle, his legs occasionally being tossed into the air and giving

astounded onlookers a glimpse of his glossy shoes and lavender spats.

Up in front the hairy-armed, spade-bearded charioteer roared triumphantly in an unknown language, again and again cracked his long, rawhide whip above the team of madly careening bays. The whip made noises like pistol shots; the words bawled in accompaniment sounded vaguely obscene. The rumble of the wooden wheels was thunder from a by-gone age.

With the chariot jumping, bouncing and swaying behind them the four frothing horses stampeded around a corner, crashed two sets of traffic lights. A third set shot toward them, lenses glowing red. Bentley waggled his eyebrows and emitted loud yelps but failed to drown the gloating howls of the driver. Spade-beard knew nothing of traffic lights, red, green, pink, purple or any other color. *Whop!* went the whip and onward they thudded with grand abandon.

Montmorency, having a sudden premonition of death, struggled to get up and face it, but was bounced flat with a horrified, "Begad, sir!" Bentley tightened his grip and shut his eyes.

A double-decker bus rolled ponderously into their path, tried to stop, amazingly danced sidewise with all the grace of a drunken elephant. Its passengers flopped around. Behind its windshield its driver stood up and flapped impotent hands.

With an unearthly yell of, *"Footsack!"* Spade-beard cracked his lash, masterfully manhandled his foaming quartet around the bonnet, scraped past by the grace of the gods and at cost of a couple of wooden spokes which parted company with a ghastly grind of timber on metal.

His hair streaming in the wind and his eyebrows still afflicted by the leaping fantods, Bentley glanced backward, saw the double-decker's battered spotlight go rolling along the road like a newly severed head. The driver now was hanging out of his side window, roaring invectives of considerable potency. Beneath the racing chariot sounded a metallic clatter as if it were dragging a sheet of old iron.

Around another bend they thundered, the vehicle sliding crab-fashion behind the pounding steeds. Halfway up the street, Spade-beard became smitten with a question. Bracketing his whip, he reined in the horses, put the question with much tongue-twisting and some distribution of sputum.

Alaham appeared, his face bearing the smug expression of one responsible for a job well done. Seeing him, Bentley remembered that the sistrum had been chiming throughout the entire journey.

"He wants to know," explained Alaham, "where you are supposed to be going."

"Going?" echoed Montmorency, staggering upright and fumbling around his own anatomy. "Odds sooth, I am demmed near gone!"

"Blast him!" added Bentley, giving Spade-beard a vicious look.

"Yes, Master," agreed Alaham with bland indifference. His not to reason why; his but to do or die. Something resembling a pocket thunderbolt flashed from his extended hand, smote the unfortunate Spade-beard upon his hirsute pate. There was a big smell of burnt flesh and a little pile of ashes.

"Murder!" yelped Montmorency, diving full tilt out of the chariot.

"By all the—!" began Bentley in horrified protest.

"Get 'em," bawled a hoarse voice. "String 'em up!" Other voices joined in, swelling angrily.

Another mob, numbered in hundreds this time. It came crowding up the street, flourishing fists, filling the air with wild shouts and bloodthirsty threats. A police patrol car and a group of three police motorcyclists were trying to beat the mob to its prey. All the signs and portents smacked of impending martyrdom.

POINTING to a tall building nearby, Bentley snapped, "Quick, get me up on that roof."

"Master, thou art there."

Swish! Bentley was on the roof. It had a flat expanse with limestone edging. Leaning over the limestone he looked down, saw a struggle of bodies over the prostrate Montmorency. Even as he watched, a burly party in dirty denims emerged from the pyramid bearing a torn lavender spat which, for no known reason, he proceeded to wave like a flag. Then Bentley remembered that he had said 'me' and not 'us.' Darn it, why

did Alaham have to take him so literally?

Giving the bells a wham, he commanded, "Bring him up here to me."

"As the Master orders."

Montmorency arrived, feet first and still kicking. He reposed on the roof, his clothes filthy and tattered, one spat missing, but the monocle still in position. There was a faint halo around his other eye. Standing feebly, he examined himself.

"Old fellah, I look like garbage." He spat out a small piece of tooth, looked vaguely around for his missing carnation. "What a binge! First time I've been like this since a brewery truck got wrecked in Piccadilly." He licked his lips, one of which was thickening. "Which reminds me, how about a quiet guzzle to fortify the inner man?"

"Bring us something to drink, Alaham."

"Yes, Master."

Snatching at thin air, Alaham produced a swollen goatskin, held out the neck invitingly. It smelled ten years overdue for burial.

"Wine!" scowled Bentley, holding his nose.

There was an uproar below. Peering over the edge, he saw the frustrated crowd tearing the chariot to pieces. Whether they were venting their temper or merely grabbing souvenirs it was impossible to tell, but he noticed that a few individuals were standing apart from the rest and glowering upward at his roof. Police vehicles were now parked outside the entrance of this building but there were no police in sight.

"Still after us," he commented.

Turning, he saw that Alaham had conjured a tall, fat-bellied jar and a pair of exotically shaped goblets. Tilting the jar, Alaham deftly filled the goblets with a thick, oily, purplish liquid.

Montmorency took an experimental sip, rolled an expectant eye heavenward, registered disappointment, had a good, long swig.

"This stuff reminds me," he said.

"Of what?" Bentley inquired.

"Of something pertaining to gnats." He finished the goblet, polished his monocle, looked moody. Skinny limbs showed through his rag-clothed legs. "You'd have thought that hootch at least ten thousand years old would have more yimp. Especially when served with djinn."

Fiery motes glowed deep in Alaham's dark eyes. "I am not a djinn, as I have told thee." He raised his hand as if about to perform a second cremation, but changed his mind and vanished.

"Dill-water," pronounced Montmorency contemptuously. He watched Bentley bottom the goblet. "I wouldn't serve it to my maiden aunt Matilda, she having a well-tested asbestos—" His voice cut off, his hair arose, his eyes protruded, and he yelled a piercing, *"whee-e-e-e!"*

" 'Smatter?" asked Bentley, staring at him.

"You wait and see. Begad, old fellah—*whee-e-e-e*—I can hardly talk—*whee-e-e-e hoo!"* He doubled over, clutching his bucket. "It's got a delayed—*youps-wha!"*

"Don't be silly," Bentley advised. "I'm standing here in brown shoes and I don't feel a—*sainted cats!"* He enveloped his middle and bowed repeatedly while the volcano inside him gave forth at full blast, filling him with fiery life and a poor sense of proportion.

After a minute he straightened, studied the jar with much respect. Montmorency eyed it with owlish reverence. Deciding that the hair of the dog was the only cure, Montmorency took his goblet, grasped the neck of the jar and made ready to tilt.

At that point an unnoticed trapdoor in the roof shot up, a beefy face surmounted by a blue cap arose majestically through the opening. The face gazed belligerently around, hardened as it discovered the coming orgy upon untaxed liquor, spoke to others waiting below.

"Here they are. Come on—after them!"

Reacting instinctively, Montmorency dropped his goblet, embraced the jar, heaved it above his head. It became horizontal as he got it up, and a gallon of slow-motion booze cascaded from its pouting mouth over his sorely-tried rags.

"By Jove," he said, turning a horrified face to Bentley and still holding up the jar. "I've spilled it."

"Throw it, you idiot!" Bentley bawled. He tugged madly at a pocket to extract the sistrum.

His face still agonized by the deed he

was about to commit, Montmorency heaved the jar with much vigor and accidentally excellent aim. It exploded bomblike upon the cranium of the law which promptly vanished from the ken of men. A loud and satisfactory thump sounded in the room beneath. Many voices arose, shouting anatomic details of the retribution soon to follow.

Then the sistrum came unstuck.

ALAHAM appeared, bowed to Bentley, glowered threateningly at the other.

"Yes, Master?"

"Transfer us to that roof." Stretching an arm, Bentley indicated a tall building barely visible in the dim distance.

"Master, it is done."

Again the mad rush of air and kaleidoscopic shift of scenes. Bentley knew that he was a poor picker the moment he landed, and the fact was emphasized by Montmorency's howl of fright. Together they went rolling down a sixty degree slope, struck the gutter with force that knocked it loose and brought a length of it twisting and twirling in company with their bodies as they began the three hundred feet drop to the street.

All the way down the roof, and beyond, the sistrum had been ringing shrilly in Bentley's sweating hand. And all the way he had been bellowing, "A flat roof—put us on a *flat* roof."

He saw the sidewalk enlarging, growing more detailed as he shot toward it mouthing his seemingly unheard cry. He saw the lifted, appalled faces of spectators of his headlong plunge to oblivion. Two seconds before the big smear was due he shut his eyes.

Faintly a voice whispered, "Yes, Master."

The spectators and the sidewalk receded crazily. Bentley whirled, spun, came upright, felt solidity beneath his feet. His shocked eyes opened, immediately told him that it never rains but it pours. It was the roof from which he had first sought escape.

Beefy-face now stood by the trap, dripping from sundry places and smelling like a distillery. Taking in the arrivals with eyes no less shocked, he roared, "That's them!" and charged with all the cumbersome determination of an irate rhinoceros.

"Another flat roof!" shouted Bentley, having learned by hard experience to be precise while sounding the angelus with all his might.

Swoosh! They gained another. It was just across the road and on a higher level. Beefy-face braced himself on the opposite coping-stone, bared his teeth at them and invited them to come back and suffer under his own two hands.

Down in the street a few splinters were all that was left of the chariot, while the erstwhile steeds were nowhere in evidence. Bentley chose another roof, doing it more carefully this time. Then another and another. The sixth choice, he thought, had carried them a safe distance from the scene of recent hostilities and brought them within easy reach of his own apartment. Then, and only then, did he rest.

"Damme," declared Montmorency, "at this rate the line won't last much longer."

"What line?"

"The family line, sir. It goes back to Eve and occasionally to the pawnbroker's." He found a handkerchief, tried to wipe off a mixture of hog's beauty cream and hootch. "I am the last of my line still in a perpendicular position—now and again."

Bentley frowned, let a few minutes go by while he recovered breath and thought things over. Then he summoned Alaham.

"Don't you ever use some initiative?"

"Master, thy meaning is strange to me."

"Darn it," complained Bentley, "you've dumped us in one fix after another."

"As the Master commands so shall it be done," retorted Alaham with much dignity and no latitude.

"Yes, but why don't you use your imagination? Why do you insist on taking me literally?"

"As the Master commands, so shall it be done."

"Oh, hellfire!" cursed Bentley, giving it up.

"Yes, Master."

A tremendous blast of searing flame promptly leaped from the roof in obedience to Alaham's ready hand. It speared toward the zenith with a violence transcending everything. Its heat was a credit even to the nether regions whence, presumably, it came.

"Put it out!" howled Bentley, dancing around on the farthest rim of the roof.

The flame disappeared as eerily as it had come. Montmorency ruefully patted portions of his attire from which small wisps of smoke crept upward. Some of the portions turned to ashes under his hand, revealing parts of his ancient line. His silk handkerchief had resolved itself into its component gases, while his shoes had become a pair of seared and wrinkled abominations in the gaping fronts of which his toes showed like distorted teeth.

"Stap me," he said, "I would be a disgrace in an ashcan."

A curious murmur ascended from the street. Bentley had a look over the edge, growled, "Holy smoke, another mob!"

UPON this roof was privacy, for a while at least. Looking at his companion, Bentley was grateful for the fact. To put it bluntly and without any false delicacy, Montmorency was one hell of a sight—and he wasn't in much better shape himself.

Trouble was there was no flat roof near enough to his apartment to enable him to point it out to Alaham. From here to there the roofs were mostly sloped. On the other hand, he did not fancy the prospect of walking through the streets and thus inviting something to get started. Their very appearance would be sufficient to begin another chain of events. Indeed, it was a moot point whether or not Montmorency would make the clink for insufficiently hiding his shame. The day's program had sapped Bentley's optimism; he was ready to believe anything possible, especially if unpleasant.

He pondered his position for some time before he hit upon a surprisingly simple solution. He rang the bells.

"Master?"

"Clothe us afresh."

Alaham's disdainful wave suggested that this sort of miracle was milk, mere milk. The results came and at once Bentley took an intense dislike to them. He didn't like his huge, baggy britches of sky-blue silk, nor the curly-toed, red leather slippers which appeared upon his feet. He didn't like his lace-trimmed velvet jacket. He didn't like the mighty yellow turban which squatted on his tired head.

As for the unfortunate Montmorency, it seemed that Alaham had at least enough imagination to be malicious. From his sequin-embroidered trousers to his great, crimson ice-cream cone of a hat, Montmorency looked like nothing so much as a weedy, dirty and disreputable djinn.

"Is this the best you can do?" demanded Bentley, surveying what he could see of himself.

"Verily, Master, if mayhap thou desirest even greater glory, I can—"

"For the love of heaven, old fellah," protested Montmorency, staring glassily at his exotic bloomers, "let sleeping dogs lie. Don't encourage him to greater efforts. Enough is as good as a feast." He expelled a long breath redolent of purple rotgut. "Ods willikins, I don't know whether I'm something out of a circus or the sartorial sensation of the season."

"You're a sensation," Bentley told him, having no doubts whatsoever.

"List, fool,' interjected Alaham, glaring at Montmorency, "art thou not satisfied?"

"Begad, yes," Montmorency was vaguely alarmed. "I could wish for nothing better."

"It is well!" said Alaham darkly and with a note of menace. Bestowing another glare, he disappeared.

That decided them to try reach a haven of peace without further aid from a mystic source. It might be best to give the overworked and unpraised Alaham a little time in which to sweeten.

SEARCHING around, they found the inevitable trapdoor. It was fastened on the underside with bolts, aged and rusty, and defied all their efforts to raise it. Together they heaved upon it, pried it, cursed it. Finally Montmorency jumped upon it and immediately plunged through the roof amid a shower of rotten wood. His pained yelp straggled up through the hole down which his idiotic headgear had just gone.

Carefully wrapping the sistrum in a handkerchief, Bentley stuffed it into a pocket, swung himself down into semi-darkness. He groped around, found a door, a landing and part of Montmorency's face.

Stairs dropped away from the landing; they raced down, taking flights and landings with reckless abandon, and reached the front entrance without encountering anyone.

Composing themselves, they ventured into the street, strolled along the sidewalk with exaggerated nonchalance. A passing motorist took in their zoot, followed them with his eyes, side-swiped a parked car and came back to the world of reality. Four urchins trailed them, making highly personal comments. Two women joined the urchins. The trackers numbered ten at the corner, twenty halfway up the street, fifty at the next corner.

It was another uncountable mob by the time the apartment came into sight. Mutually motivated by they knew not what, the pair broke into a run. Bentley's turban fell off but somehow his companion's crimson cone stayed put, though it leaned at a rakish angle. The monocle likewise held its place, the last remaining relic of an ensemble long since gone.

Fidgeting by the front door, Bentley oathed while he sought his always elusive key. The crowd caught up, made a semicircle around the front steps, stared and muttered. Montmorency adjusted his cone, bleared back at them with an eye like that of an antique cod. Then, while Bentley tugged and fumbled, Mrs. Kelly opened the door. Her Irish face went warlike as she surveyed the cluster littering her sidewalk.

"Well, an' phwat might you folks be nozin' into?" Her single-minded glare became aware of someone attired in neon signs, she shifted her gaze, discovered the objects of the crowd's attention. Her eyes stuck out, her bosom heaved with emotion.

"It's all right, Mrs. Kelly," assured Bentley quickly. "We're doing this for a bet."

Before she could frame a suitable reply he was past her and up the stairs. He gained his rooms with Montmorency close upon his heels. Closing the door, they flopped into chairs, looked dumbly at each other.

After a while, Montmorency said, "Begad, sir, I am fated to be stuffed and exhibited." A little later he added, "Some more of that purple peril is in order, I think."

Pulling out the sistrum, Bentley said bitterly, "Brother, are you a glutton for punishment!"

"So far, it's the only thing we've had worth getting," Montmorency pointed out. "Make him bring us another jar, there's a good fellah."

Much against his better judgment, Bentley rang the bells. He flourished the sistrum with an air of deepest gloom. Forty-five piastres! Old Abbas should have paid him to take it away.

"Yes, Master?"

"More of that wine."

AFTER finishing the third successive goblet Bentley viewed the world in rosier light. It had to be admitted that the purple stuff was good. He had a fire in his belly and the smoke thereof was curling pleasurably around his brain. He waved the sistrum in manner of an emperor summoning the court.

"Alaham," he articulated, "my friend needs a bath." Getting the friend into focus, he volunteered, "He stinketh."

"Verily," agreed Alaham. "As a goat."

"Isha ninshult!" said Montmorency, speaking the language of the purple wine.

"Or a very stale camel," suggested Alaham, with some degree of accuracy.

"Alaham, create us the bath."

A lordly wave of the hand. The walls of the room shifted, grew shadowy, then somehow solidified into a pattern of turquoise tiles. A large sunken bath of purest turquoise appeared in the middle of the floor.

Surveying this phenomenon with drink-sodden eyes, it didn't occur to either that a bath of that depth ought to stick a good distance through the ceiling of the room beneath. Neither did their ears detect a strange buzz underfoot. There had been a strange buzz in their ears this last half hour, anyway.

Warm water sweetly scented with Samarian rose filled the bath. Stringed instruments sent soft, soothing sounds from behind a curtained alcove. The subtle fragrance of the bath permeated the air along with the music, and all was peace and eternal bliss.

Montmorency exclaimed, "By Jove, sir!" and took off two-thirds of his clothing. His breath competed with the bath, and for

reasons best known to himself he retained his underpants and monocle.

Delightedly he stepped to the edge of the bath, tested it with a toe, said, "Ah!" picked up a partly filled goblet and prepared to take it with him as he jumped in.

Two sinuous, brown-skinned slave girls darted from the alcove to assist him. At the same time a lithe, half-nude nautch dancer appeared at the head of the bath and started snaking around in time with the music. Montmorency promptly swigged his goblet, dropped his monocle, snatched a hanging drape to cover what he apparently thought uncovered. The slave girls dutifully tugged at the drape.

Bentley was lying back making encouraging remarks to both sides when eventually the uproar from below penetrated his ears and he reached for the sistrum. Simultaneously, the door opened and Mrs. Kelly's broad, furious face was framed in the gap.

Taking in the scene, especially the nautch dancer now wrestling with a yard of muslin, she said, "Whoi, ye indacent divvils, I'd have the perlace up here in double quick toime, an'—"

Waggling the sistrum, Bentley ordered, "Remove this and make it exactly as before."

"Yes, Master."

He glanced to the door. "Drunk again, Mrs. Kelly?"

Her face was a picture of dumbfoundment as she saw the room suddenly restored to its old appearance. She left in a rush.

Bentley's grin faded out as he heard sounds of heated argument downstairs. Mrs. Kelly, of course, was not the only one who had witnessed strange, inexplicable events. The occupants of the room below had seen enough to keep their tongues wagging for weeks. Neighbors, too, had watched his gaudy arrival.

Supposing the witnesses read the evening papers, their eyes bugging over colorful tales of what had happened elsewhere, and supposing they correctly put two and two together? Looked like he'd better move before he was moved to the jug.

Making up his mind, he offered the fateful sistrum to the half-dressed Montmorency now struggling into his glorious britches, and said, "Here, you can have this danged contraption."

"Me?" Montmorency sought his monocle, found it, screwed it into an eye and viewed the sistrum with open disfavor. "Not me, sir. Stap me, I'd as soon accept my death warrant."

Watching him complete his dressing, Bentley mulled the problem again. Then a notion struck him. He sounded the bells.

"Alaham, can you restore all things, making them exactly as they were at, say, nine o'clock this morning?"

"Indeed, Master, thy commands may make alteration within the limits of the powers of my kind, but there can be no restoration except that—" He hesitated, both doubtful and eager.

"Except what?" Bentley encouraged.

"Except that thou on thy part do restore the ankh to me, willingly and of thine own free will."

"Then," said Bentley, firmly and decisively, "I do restore the ankh, not only willingly, but gladly."

The long, thin fingers of Alaham caressed the relic as they received it. His eyes glittered with a pleasure that has awaited culmination through eons of time. He crooned over it in a low, loving voice.

"Freedom! Freedom from command! At last! *At last!*"

"Action, djinn," suggested Montmorency, struggling to fasten the cord of his britches.

Alaham's eyes sparked. Fondling the sistrum, he pronounced, "As at the Hour of the Dog, so shall this abode be, and so shall the Master be." He paused, turned to Montmorency, finished, "And thou also!" For the last time he vanished.

Reposing in his clean, well-cut tweeds, Bentley regarded the stark naked Montmorency and asked, "Where the heck were you at zero hour?"

"In the steam-room giving the pores a treat." He felt over himself, shivered. "I ought to have told him."

"Hah!" said Bentley. He mused and went on, "I've no spare clothes. I'm traveling light. Best I can do is dig you up some bathing trunks and phone for a taxi."

"In a taxi, like that?" Montmorency went weak. "Hell's bells!"

No personal apology will suffice for holding witchcraft up to ridicule.

Which's Witch?

BY HAROLD LAWLOR

SINCE my daily newspaper feature, *The Jaundiced Eye*, has caught on so well, I've been working at home. Ann, my wife, in the intervals between caring for our three-year-old, Susie, is bound and determined to be what she calls my Inspiration. As a labor of love, she has taken it upon herself to open the daily mail, screen it, listen to my complaints, interrupt me when I'm really rolling, get under my feet and in my hair and perform other services of real and doubtful value.

But don't get me wrong. I love her.

Anyway, that's how she happened to become involved in the witchcraft thing along with me.

That ill-starred morning, Ann nibbled her thumb-nail a moment as she read the note, as if undecided whether or not to throw it into the waste-basket.

"Something?" I asked.

"Well—yes," she said dubiously, tossing it over to me. "You've been groaning for an article idea. Maybe there's one."

I read the thing.

"There's a witch living at 4927 Upton Road."

That was all. There was no date, no salutation, no ending. Just that one sentence written in excellent chirography on good notepaper. I glanced at the envelope, which bore no return address or other identifying marks. It had been addressed to me at the local paper that carries my feature, and had been forwarded from there.

Anonymous letters usually bear the hall-

mark of the illiterate, but this one definitely didn't.

"H'm," I said. "I suppose the witch is some poor old woman with a spiteful neighbor."

Ann shook her red head. "I thought of that, but it seems to me that a spiteful person would have made some grisly suggestions as to what should be done with the witch. This merely tells you that there is a witch at that address."

"And—?"

"It's a suggestion for a column, isn't it? It could be from a friend of yours, rather than an enemy of the supposed witch's. Anyway, it sounds like material for a humorous column, so saddle your hoss, chum, and get out there," Ann suggested, with that light that comes into her eyes whenever she's sure she's inspiring me. "Bring back enough notes for one of those inimitable articles of yours. Something to bring a tear to the eye, a smile to the lips, a tug to the heart-strings—"

"And another skin toward that mink coat for my hard-working wife."

"Now you're talking," Ann grinned. "Git!"

So you can see for yourselves that we didn't take this very seriously. I mean it wasn't any belief in witches that led me to unleash the Chrysler's mighty horses and drive out there.

I had only a hazy acquaintance with the neighborhood, for it was one of the new ones developed since the war, and subdivided by a realtor named Gallow—which was unfortunate. *He* called the subdivision Sandy Knoll, but of course it was inevitable that some wag should re-name it Gallow's Hill, and the name stuck—to the not inconsiderable annoyance of the better-than-well-to-do dwellers thereon. When they heard there was a witch living in their midst—!

I grinned at the thought.

Forty-nine twenty-seven Upton Road proved to be the address of a house right at the crest of the hill. I parked the Chrysler in front of it, leaned my arms on the steering wheel, and breathed incredulously, "Oh, no!"

It was one of those stark, ultra-modern jobs, all plate-glass and concrete and upward jutting eaves. No witch in her right mind, I was sure, would ever have chosen a dwelling so incongruous.

But I was here, and I would go through with it.

I left the car, went to the front entrance under the stainless steel canopy, and pushed the bell. It rang melodious chimes that I could faintly hear through the coral-painted door.

It opened immediately. I expected to find a trimly uniformed maid glancing at me inquiringly.

I saw, instead, a small blonde in yellow sun-shorts and bra. If she was a misshapen witch, the world should be full of them. She bore so absurd a resemblance to a dainty doll of Susie's that I was struck dumb, and it took me a minute to recover, but her welcoming smile never faded by even a fraction.

"Uh, I've come to see the witch," I said, feeling like a fool and undoubtedly sounding like one, too.

Blurting it out like that, I shouldn't have been surprised if she had fled in terror as from a maniac. But, while she frowned slightly with annoyance, or some emotion I couldn't fathom, she stood her ground valiantly.

Before she could order me to leave (as I fully expected her to do), I handed her the note that had come in that morning's mail. She read it at a glance, her frown deepening, then stepped back and said, "Come in."

THE hall and the living room were like the outside of the house, stark and bare, but with great splashes of color everywhere relieving the barrenness—tangerine, lime-green, citron-yellow. Traverse draperies enclosed the room on two sides, and before the unlit fireplace were ceramic pots bearing those plants I've always detested—*monstera*, I think they call them—with great, green leaves slotted like serving spoons.

I nodded at the note she still held in her hand. "Have you any idea who wrote that, or why it was written?"

"If you mean a particular individual, no. Obviously it was written by someone who resents me and seeks to embarrass me. After all, is it so surprising?" The blonde eyebrows lifted coldly, and for the first time

she looked anything but doll-like. "Witches have never been popular, even with those who readily avail themselves of her talents."

It was a minute before I realized the full import of what she had said. "You mean—you are a witch?"

"Certainly. The seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, with all that that implies."

I regarded her dubiously. "This is a gag? In a minute I'll get the point and laugh my head off?"

"I, Maria Loyos, never jest. Why are people—supposedly intelligent people—so loath to accept the unfamiliar? They laughed at Columbus, the Wright Brothers, the science-fiction writers of twenty years ago who predicted the atomic bomb. But the world is round, the Wright Brothers did fly, the atomic bomb is a reality."

"You talk as if witches were something entirely new," I protested.

"Aren't we? To those who have never believed in us, we're as new as tomorrow's developments in nuclear fission."

I was listening to this with increasing bewilderment, unable to decide whether I ought to laugh or not. It was as absurd as if I were to meet Betty Grable and have her assure me that she was a witch. I was much too disconcerted to be tactful.

"This is the silliest combination of sense and nonsense that I've ever heard!"

Maria Loyos' eyes grew cold as a wind from the tundra. "It occurs to me belatedly to ask—who are you?"

I told her.

"Ah, yes, a newspaperman. One understands the point of the note to you now. But the writer of it misjudged me. One must move with the times. Instead of shrinking from it, as the writer evidently hoped, I shouldn't be averse to the right kind of publicity."

"Who is?" I asked drily. "But if you've read *The Jaundiced Eye*—"

"I have."

"Then you know its general tone," I said. "Irreverent, cynical, tongue-in-cheek. You can hardly expect me to believe in witchcraft."

"Perhaps not." To my surprise, she smiled mischievously, revealing beguiling dimples, and looking more than ever like Susie's doll. "On the other hand, perhaps one day I can give you a practical demonstration of my powers."

"You should live so long," I laughed, and took my departure, feeling sure that there was nothing in this interview for me, and that it was useless to pursue it. It wasn't that I considered Maria Loyos insincere in her statements, exactly. It wasn't even that I thought her insane. But one meets so many border-line cases, people with fixed ideas—

So I left.

However, the visit proved to be not entirely fruitless, for after I'd reached home and laughed about it with Ann, the absurdity of the whole thing kept me chuckling so much that it interfered with any other work. Finally, more as catharsis than anything else, I did a little fast and sketchy research on witchcraft in the encyclopedia, pulled the typewriter toward me, and pounded out a column about Maria Loyos. I called it *The Chic Witch of Gallow's Hill,* and it was written in my most light-hearted manner.

The trouble with humorous writing, though, is that it sometimes runs away with you. Your critical faculties go to sleep, and you treat your subject matter too irreverently, too flippantly, as I treated Maria Loyos and witchcraft in that next day's feature article.

This proved to be my error, and very nearly my undoing.

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ON THE day after *The Chic Witch of Gallow's Hill* appeared in print, Ann came into my study.

"She's here."

Writing another article, I had been struggling mightily for the *mot juste,* and was in no mood to be interrupted. I said peevishly, "Who's here?"

"The Chic Witch of Gallow's Hill."

"Oh, Lord," I said, pushing the typewriter on its stand away from me. "She's hopping, I suppose?"

"She isn't exactly bearing a great sheaf of scarlet roses for her beloved biographer," Ann admitted.

I felt a twinge of remorse that was entirely genuine. Upon reading the published column the day before, I hadn't been at all satisfied with it. Writing it, I'd intended it to be gentle satire, but as I told you, humor

sometimes runs away with you, and in cold print it occurred even to me that I'd been a shade too cavalier, even vitriolic, in my treatment of Maria Loyos.

It was with a very real desire to make such amends as I could, then, that I went back to the living room with Ann, determined to soothe our visitor's ruffled feelings. I'd stepped on sensitive toes before this in my short career, and was sure I could apply the necessary healing balm.

Maria Loyos was *soignée* in black. She carried yesterday's paper folded to my column, and tapped it with a blood-red fingernail now.

"Am I supposed to thank you for this?" she asked sharply.

"My dear Miss Loyos, I can't begin to tell you how sorry I am. I admit I dealt with you much more roughly than I'd intended."

"Oh, I don't care for myself! But you've held witchcraft itself up to ridicule. There's no apology that you can make to me personally which will permit me to ignore that!"

I really felt misgivings as I watched her face. Temper, I could deal with. But there was a cold, underlying implacability about Maria Loyos which aroused a distinctly unpleasant sensation along my spine. I think Ann sensed this, too, for she came over to put her arm through mine. Despite the unpleasantness of the situation, Ann's gesture made me repress a smile, for I was sure she was dramatizing herself as the devoted, loyal little woman.

"Now here's what I demand," Maria Loyos went on, her harsh words oddly at variance with her pleasant appearance. (You understand that all through the interview, her features betrayed no emotion whatever, but remained as bland and expressionless as those of Susie's doll which she so closely resembled.) "I demand that you write a column immediately, for tomorrow's publication, in which you retract everything you said to discredit witchcraft, and announce, instead your conversion and belief in it."

Naturally her ultimatum and the confident tone in which it was voiced irritated me.

"You don't want much," I scoffed. "Do you realize that if I did as you ask, in a syndicated column, I'd be the laughing-stock not only of the city but of the entire country?"

"That's your problem," Maria said sharply. "You created it originally; it's up to you to solve it."

I shook my head. "I'll gladly and sincerely say I'm sorry that I wounded your feelings. But that other—no."

"You refuse?"

"He certainly does!" Ann spoke up. "In fact, even if he were willing to write such an asinine column, I wouldn't let him! Because I know witchcraft is nonsense, too, and he said nothing in the first article that wasn't true!"

There was an ominous silence.

"This is regrettable," Maria Loyos said softly, opening her purse. "My request was not unreasonable, from my point of view, but you have refused it. So—" She withdrew a lump of wax.

I kept a straight face, and feigned alarm. "You're not going to make a wax figure of me and stick pins in it?"

She looked at me expressionlessly. "I have a livelier fate in mind for you." She went on, "It's obvious to me that you love your wife?"

It was a semi-question that I didn't bother to confirm. I'm sure it's obvious to anybody that Ann and Susie are my whole reason for living. But Maria wasn't waiting for an answer, anyway. She was eyeing Ann like a portrait painter, her fingers moving busily the while over the lump of wax. In an incredibly short time, she had made an entirely creditable facsimile in miniature of Ann.

We waited, half-amused. And it was with an absurd feeling of anti-climax, considering our disbelief anyway, that we watched Maria replace the wax doll in her purse without making any further menacing move.

Maria smiled at our puzzlement. "Haste plays no part in this," she enlightened us. "It's to be avoided, indeed, if the whole savor of the situation is to be realized. Presently, Mr. Murray, your wife will begin to feel ill. She will grow increasingly ill. Her feet will pain her, then her legs, as the malady moves upward. She won't be better until you write that article of retraction. And if you don't—"

"And if I don't?"

"Then you will come to me next time," Maria said softly, "as a supplicant, on your knees."

AT FIRST, we thought it coincidence. Shortly after Maria's visit, Ann began having trouble with her feet. The circulation of blood wasn't as it should be, and she complained both of numbness and mild stabbing pains of the sort known colloquially as "pins and needles." There were several weeks of this, interspersed with days when the trouble disappeared and Ann seemed entirely well again. But when the numbness returned, it was always worse than it had been before.

The best podiatrists in the city expressed themselves as being baffled. They were unable to locate or account for the source of the trouble.

Unfortunately, the situation didn't remain static.

The numbness crept up to Ann's knees. She was unable to walk and was forced to take to her bed. At the end of a week, her doctor came to me, and suggested that Ann be removed to the hospital where her condition could be studied more closely. Ann and I talked it over, and though it was a wrench for her to leave Susie with me in the care of a practical nurse, we agreed with the doctor and Ann went into the hospital.

At first she seemed to improve, and we were hopeful. For three days the pain in her legs lessened, and the doctors were jubilant, though they confessed to me privately that they didn't know just what part of their treatment had done the good work. The case had been entirely baffling to them.

But after three days of improvement, the insidious, creeping malady moved upward again. It was a black moment when Dr. Bolton came to me and told me Ann was paralyzed from the waist down. They were intensifying the treatment that had seemed efficacious before, but now it was without effect.

"Frankly," Bolton said, "I don't know what to do, except try to make your wife as comfortable as possible. If the paralysis continues to move upward, when it reaches the heart—"

He broke off, shaking his head.

That decided me. I went to see Maria Loyos. My disbelief in witches and witchcraft was unshaken— My God! How *could* I believe that one human being could do to another what was being done to Ann?—but I was curious about the threat she had made, and I dared leave no stone unturned now with Ann's very life at stake.

Five weeks had elapsed since Maria's call on us. When she opened her door to me, it was with a feline smile that suggested she had been awaiting my appearance with catlike patience. There was no warmth in her voice as she told me to enter.

I was abrupt. "My wife is very ill."

"Ah!" Maria's exclamation was noncommittal.

"It seems to be a sort of creeping numbness. She's paralyzed from the waist down." I watched Maria closely. It was impossible to read her expressionless face. I went on desperately, "You *couldn't* have had anything to do with this!"

I didn't like the note of pleading in my own voice.

"Just so," she agreed tantalizingly. And again I had the impression she was playing with me, cat-like.

If she chose to bait me like this, my position was untenable. Once again I felt her threat had been the most arrant nonsense. She could never have caused Ann's illness. It wasn't possible and I must have been out of my mind to come. I grasped at that straw. That was it! I had been nearly out of my mind, with grief and worry about Ann. Reassured by my own reasoning, I turned away. I had nearly reached the hall before Maria called me.

I turned.

"Wait!" Maria commanded. "I would show you something." She went to a desk drawer, withdrew what she wanted, and held it out for me to see.

It was the wax figure she had made of Ann that day. But now it was altered. Now it was transfixed with pins from the waist down. I heard an animal snarl emanating from my own throat as I took a menacing step forward.

"Wait!" Maria commanded again. "Another step, and I will crush the figure in my hand. And Ann will die at once!"

That halted me, but it didn't eradicate the

hatred in my eyes. Maria saw it. Oh, she saw it all right! And she laughed diabolically.

"This," she said, "is what is known as a witch's doll. You have seen it before, as a skeptic, without the pins. As I moved the pins upward, your wife suffered correspondingly. She will continue to suffer. Poor little figure," she crooned, her eyes carefully on me, judging the effect of what she was saying. "Its feet, didn't they? Just a little, and just at first. But I was kind, I was merciful. I removed the pins, and relieved it of its pain. But only for three days. I couldn't be too merciful, for the—person had not yet been sufficiently punished. Alas, I was forced to insert the pins again. Look, Mr. Murray! Look, all the way to the figure's waist! She's paralyzed from the waist down. How sad!"

The mocking, pseudo-sympathetic voice ceased purling, and the room was silent as a cell. I stared at the wax figure, mesmerized as much by it, as by the soft, crooning voice of my horrible hostess.

"And—and later?" I asked.

Maria pursed her lips, considering. "Eventually, this, I suppose," and she poised a pin over the spot where the figure's heart would be. Over *Ann's* heart!

"Don't insert that pin!" I shouted.

"Why, Mr. Murray!" tauntingly. "I assure you I would never be so hasty and unskillful. It would be better, perhaps, if I were carefully to avoid the region of the heart, saving that until the very end, increasing and prolonging Ann's torture for as long a time as possible. I think—yes, I think—I might next insert the pin in the head. Ah, headaches! Unconsciousness!"

"You—!"

"Witch?" she supplied the epithet blandly. "But, Mr. Murray, you don't *believe* in witches!"

"No I don't!" I shouted illogically, considering my obvious terror. I turned on my heel and fled from the room.

And her mocking laughter followed me.

Oh, it was fantastic! It had to be fantastic! But I was shaken badly and needed reassurance from someone near to me. Without thinking of the possible damaging effect upon her, I went to Ann and told her the whole story.

I might have trusted in her sanity, her ability to reenforce my well-nigh shattered morale.

Her genuine amusement was heartening to hear. "Roy, darling, can't you see how preposterous this is? Are you losing your sense of humor? You're letting your natural concern for me addle your senses. Good heavens, dear, *witches!*" Her laughter bubbled as merrily as ever.

She found no answering grin on my face. "If you had been there," I said, my hands clenching to still their quivering. "If you had heard her. How singularly convincing she was."

Ann looked at me closely, and sobered. She leaned forward to clutch my arm, and say intently, "Roy, promise me this! No matter how bad my condition becomes, no matter what you come to believe personally, promise me you'll never give that woman the satisfaction of spinelessly following her commands. I'd rather die! Promise me!"

Her voice rose so hysterically that to quiet her I swore I never would. Brave words, empty words. Oh, perhaps I wouldn't have found it so hard to stick to my oath. God knows my own reason approved it. But—

The next day, Ann began to have headaches, to lose consciousness at intervals, to moan and whimper like a child in her semi-coma. It was torture for me to watch, to listen, to stand by helplessly, unable to help her in her torment.

I bore it as long as I could, then went again to Maria Loyos.

She was awaiting me, without surprise. She knew, in some weird way, that I was coming. Perhaps she even knew what I was going to do. I went, not as a craven beggar. I charged past her like a madman, began to ransack the room and what little furniture it contained, searching for the wax doll she had made of Ann.

I could not find it. Maria stood by, her enigmatic smile widening to a grin as she watched my futile efforts.

I strode toward her, caught her throat between my hands.

"Give me that infernal doll you made of Ann! Where is it? Give it to me!"

I succeeded, at least, in wiping that grin from her face. She tried to speak, but

couldn't. I relaxed my grip sufficiently so that she could answer me, if she would.

"Dear Mr. Murray, how impetuous you are!" She was mocking as ever, even with her throat under my hands. "Don't you understand that you can't force me to give you that doll? Harm me, kill me, and your wife remains hopelessly paralyzed and unconscious. Would you rather inflict that on her? A living death?"

I hadn't thought of that before. Maria's grin was back as my hands dropped away from her throat. Her laughter was a shrill keening that cut the air like a knife.

When she'd recovered from her unholy glee, she asked me, standing there so baffled, so stupidly, "You'll write that article of retraction now?"

Perhaps it was more spite than courage that gave me the strength to defy her. "Never!"

Maria was not abashed. "Poor little Ann!" she crooned, as if to the hidden doll. "Suffering, and only because her husband is so stubborn."

My face twisted as I turned away. But Maria was not yet through. She went on, "Another thing, you have a child? A pity! When Ann is gone, I'm afraid—very much afraid—that something dreadful will begin happening to—isn't Susie her name?"

I shivered, unable to answer this new threat.

"I would go to Ann," Maria's silky voice suggested relentlessly. "I would tell her of this new—possibility. You'll find her conscious, and able to talk to you."

I turned at that, hope lighting my eyes. "How do you know?"

"I shall remove one pin for a while. Not too long a while. I shouldn't delay, if I were you."

My shoulders sagged. Again defeated, I ignominiously left the house of Maria Loyos.

ANN *was* conscious.

When I returned to the hospital, her mind was clear though her physical condition remained unchanged. I had no intention of harassing her with Maria's new threat, but I'd reckoned without the close rapport that had always existed between Ann and myself. She sensed at once that

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something was wrong, and grew so hysterically insistent to know that I had no choice between two evils but to tell her.

"I'll write the article at once, of course," I said miserably, "as Maria demands. I can't gamble with the lives of you and Susie, just to salve my own ego."

The threat to Susie had frightened Ann terribly, of course. But she has courage, Ann has. She said, "It isn't just egotism; Can't you see that this is bigger than either of us now? To do as Maria says is tatamount to denying God. You can't write it. You'll have to find some way, instead, to defeat that woman."

"Then you believe, too, at last, that she is responsible for—this?"

"I—Oh, I don't know what to believe! Perhaps there *is* something in what she—but no! We won't even consider that. Listen, you told me once of some acquaintance of yours, Carl, Carl Wilhelm—wasn't that his name?—who dabbled in the occult and esoteric. We know nothing of the possibilities behind any of this, but there must be a rationalistic explanation. Perhaps he—" She broke off to whimper, "Oh, my head! It hurts again!"

I lowered her back on her pillows, and hastily summoned the nurse. Before I left, Ann was unconscious again. I looked at my watch as I left the hospital. Two o'clock. My jaw set grimly. I'd give myself three hours, no more, to find some way of defeating Maria Loyos. If by five o'clock I wasn't successful, I'd surrender to her and do as she wished.

YOU'VE undoubtedly heard of Carl Wilhelm. He probably has spent more time in Africa than any other living man. A few years back, he had written an *exposé* of African witch-doctors and their methods which the critics had found noteworthy. Unfortunately, I had never read it, but in my days as a reporter, I had interviewed Wilhelm once or twice. A man a little under average height, thick-set, with a still, inexpressive face that is somehow comforting to confide in.

I told him the story, stating it as a hypothetical case, and mentioning no names. I was afraid if he knew how personally the story affected Ann and myself, he might entertain doubts of my sanity. It seemed safer to hide behind a cloak of anonymity.

He heard me through.

"Interesting," he commented. "Very interesting, though it follows the usual pattern, and contains nothing new."

"Are you telling me that the woman is doing this? That she is a witch?" I asked. "I don't believe it!"

For waver as I would, I always returned to my initial skepticism.

Wilhelm smiled tolerantly. "My dear Murray, if I show a gun to an ignorant savage, who knew nothing of firearms, gunpowder or bullets, and told him that it could kill him, he probably wouldn't believe it, either. Yet we both know that it could kill a man, even though it would look like hocus-pocus to the savage if he saw its effect. He might even call it—witchcraft."

"And what looks like witchcraft to us—?"

"Is nothing more than the power of suggestion. You perceive how it is done? You will remember that the witch always told the victim—either directly or indirectly through the husband, who unwittingly played into the witch's hands by repeating her threats to his wife—*beforehand* what she was going to do, and just how she was going to make the wife ill. That was all the victim needed to hear. Her own mind did the rest."

"But the victim doesn't believe in witches or witchcraft!" I protested. "Surely faith in the witch's threats would be necessary for them to have any effect? How could the witch suggest the victim into an illness, when she is an out-and-out skeptic?"

"My dear Murray, the victim is a skeptic with her *conscious* mind, as almost all of us are. But there remains the *subconscious*, or *unconscious* mind to be reckoned with. Witness the way all of us believe, as children, in the grim horror of fairy tales. No matter how rational we may think ourselves as adults, some of that will to belief always remains, buried deep down within us."

"And witches know this, make use of it deliberately under the guise of witchcraft?"

But to my surprise, Wilhelm shook his head. "I doubt it. My own theory is that women who think themselves witches are sincere. They sincerely believe they are the

possessors of dark powers. They make use of suggestion, yes, but they do not give it the credit for the havoc they wreak. They think it all due solely to the fact that they are witches."

"But why should anyone begin to think herself a witch,"

Wilhelm shrugged. "We know nothing of such a woman's past. Perhaps there was something, some seed—"

I remembered. "If she were born, for instance, the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter—?"

"There you are," Wilhelm nodded. "That knowledge might suffice. And with that as a foundation, a credulous woman could build. Suggestion again, you see. But auto-suggestion, in that case."

And I knew, then, what I was going to do. I asked Wilhelm some leading questions, and by God's grace he was able to tell me what I needed to know. It was only a gamble, but one I had to take.

I WENT home first. Mrs. Godden, the nurse I'd hired to look after Susie, asked: "How is Mrs. Murray?"

"About the same," I said, and added grimly, "but she's going to be better."

"Oh, splendid! The little girl misses her so."

I held Susie close for a minute, then taking what I needed from the nursery and sewing room, I drove to Upton Road. I wasn't carrying a gun, but I might just as well have been, for there was murder in my heart.

I think Maria Loyos herself sensed this as she admitted me. I gave her no greeting, waited for no invitation to enter, but pushed past her and went into the living room. There I turned around, and waited grimly for her to sit down. She tried at first to be flippant.

"How stern you look!" she said, with her old mocking manner. She eyed the package in my hand. "You've brought me a gift?"

"Yes." I smiled, and I don't think she could have liked the smile, for some of the mockery faded from her face. "But first let me tell you that I've spent a very instructive afternoon with—Carl Wilhelm."

"Wilhelm?" Her brows knitted. Then: "Oh!"

Her face changed.

I smiled again. I was glad to see that Maria had heard of him, too, for it made my task easier.

"He has lived with African tribes, you know," I went on, "and has made a profound study of African witch-doctors and their methods. He was able to teach me several things this afternoon."

Maria moistened her lips, but said nothing. She watched as I drew from the paper bag I carried the doll of Susie's that Maria so closely resembled. She saw the resemblance herself at once, for her eyes widened as her glance came up to meet mine.

"Yes," I nodded. "It's very like you. A perfect image, in fact, which saved me the trouble of having one made. A lucky coincidence, no?" My fingers dipped into the bag again. "And here's something else you will probably recognize."

And I showed her a length of scarlet woolen thread.

Maria shrank back in her chair.

"Ouanga!" she breathed. "The scarlet thread of death!"

"Yes. Only the *ouanga* is noted for its effectiveness. It never fails its purpose, for it belonged to K'Tumi, the most powerful witch-doctor in all the Belgian Congo."

Maria's eyes flickered nervously.

"Will you give me Ann's doll?" I said.

Maria shook her head.

"You know what's coming?" I asked.

She found her voice. "You—you haven't the power."

"No? I assure you Carl Wilhelm is a very clever teacher. And I was a most apt pupil."

Maria's shoulders twitched. I tried to keep calm, tried to quell such doubts as I felt about the success of my coming bluff. But it had to be done. It was the only chance I had.

I sat down, holding the doll on my lap, swinging the string almost absently. Then, as Maria's eyes, hypnotized, followed the moving string from side to side, pendulum-fashion, I muttered, as if musing aloud: "Yes. I think the throat. I'll wind the string around the throat like this—so!—then slowly tighten it—slowly—slowly—" I looked at Maria. "Why, Miss Loyos! You seem to be having trouble with your breathing!"

Her breast was heaving. Her breathing

was nervous, rapid; and though she tried to speak, she couldn't seem to summon her voice. Her hands went to her throat, terrified, but her eyes remained fixedly on the doll in my hands. Slowly, so that she might see clearly what I was doing, I pulled the thread a little tighter about the throat of Susie's doll.

Maria struggled to her feet. "Don't! Don't!" she whispered.

My eyes didn't leave her face. But my fingers began relentlessly to draw the scarlet thread tighter. Maria's face began to purple. One hand at her throat, the other motioned for me to desist.

I grinned malevolently.

Maria dropped to her knees, her eyes bulging from her head, her face congested with blood.

"The doll!" I whispered intensely. "Ann's doll! Get it, while you still have the chance."

She got to her feet with an effort, tried desperately to make her will refuse. I drew the thread tighter, tighter still. Somehow a scream managed to tear itself past the barrier in her throat. She turned, and tottered to a cabinet on one wall, pressed a secret sliding panel, pulled out a drawer so frenziedly that it came all the way out of the cabinet and fell to the floor.

And Ann's doll, pin-studded, flew out.

Maria stooped down to pick it up, but I was there, too, and snatched it from her hands. She reached out a hand for Susie's doll, *her* doll, whispered in agony, "Now! Give!"

But I wouldn't give it to her. I removed the pins, instead, from Ann's doll, and put both doll and pins together into my pocket.

Maria watched with agonized eyes to see what I would do next.

I was tempted, but I was merciful. Without too much delay, I unwound the scarlet thread from the neck of her doll, and replaced both doll and thread in the bag I carried.

Maria groaned in relief, and some of the congested blood began fading from her face.

She rubbed her aching throat, and I waited until I knew she was attending me.

"If Ann is ever again mysteriously ill," I said, "I'll wind the scarlet thread about the throat of your doll. And this time I'll pull it completely taut and tie it! But not before I've wound it first about the head. Not before I've made of you—a gibbering idiot! You understand?"

Her eyes widened in horror, and she nodded mutely.

When I returned to the hospital again, Ann was conscious, but she still insisted that she couldn't walk. And I knew that I must try counter-suggestion, for her subconscious mind was reluctant or unable to relinquish its strangle-hold.

Quickly I told her of everything that had happened. I took the doll and pins from my pocket when I'd finished, and said, "See? The pins are gone, and Maria's spell is forever broken. Your mind is clear, and you are *not* paralyzed. You can walk! Come!" I held out my hand. "Get up and walk!"

And she did.

THAT was six months ago, and the two dolls are before me on my desk as I write. Ann and I believed that Maria's sway over her was nothing but powerful suggestion offered to a susceptible mind. My own victory over Maria was counter-suggestion, when I possessed no wizard's powers, proved that to our satisfaction.

But there's a baffling denouement to the story. I've never told Ann.

At Thanksgiving, we went to my grandmother's farm to spend the holiday weekend. And one afternoon, when the women were busy in the kitchen, I came across my grandmother's Bible, while I was searching aimlessly for something to read. And in the careful chronicle that she had kept of the family history—births, marriages, deaths—I made an interesting discovery. Something that I had never known before.

It seems that I am the seventh son of a seventh son.

Now I don't know what to believe! Do you suppose—?

The Emperor's Letter

by David Lewis Eynon

Heading by Joseph Eberle

The dead aren't dead enough; they live to plague the living.

THE wind had died and the half empty bottle of brandy, like a flickering lantern between the two old friends, caught the dying rays of the fire and splashed them across the rough table.

"And so you see," Professor Picard squeezed his pince-nez in a yellowed linen mouchoir, "the dead aren't dead enough. They live on, through their mistakes, their lies, their secrets—to plague the living for years after their burial."

"But this one document," complained Lebrun, "surely it can't be that important?"

"Who can say?" Picard smiled at his friend, groping for the words to explain why such importance should be attached to a single letter—contents unknown.

For years—since their student days—the story had been the same. Astride Picard, historian, man of letters (if only dead letters, as Lebrun used to laugh) living in the past, among the musty records of the long deceased. While Lebrun, politician, man of affairs, met the world—the living world—head on and bent it to his desires.

The fact that they vacationed now in the Alps—after Paul dragged the Professor from his book-lined lair out into the sunshine—showed that their friendship far outweighed their difference of interests. But how to make Paul understand that a single missing link—however small, however innocuous—was intolerable to the scholastic mind?

"It is like . . . like a detective story," said Picard after much searching for a comparison. He saddled the metaphor and galloped ahead. "Until each detail is found, each clue documented, how can one be certain that the case is closed?"

"But such a small detail." Lebrun felt for a cigar. "You set out to document Napoleon's relations with the state of Parma. *Alors,* you ticket each letter, each paper—until the whole relationship is clear. And that *one* dispatch, totally without importance in the pattern, escapes you—this should drag you into the wilds of the Ober Bernese?"

"C'est vrai," Picard admitted. "A small thing, certainly, but still, you insisted upon a vacation—and is not this a change, *mon ami?"* He waved his hand around the large, warm room of the old inn and then reached for the bottle.

"A change, indeed!" Lebrun tested the brandy against the firelight and drew out a cigar. "Tell me," he punctuated with puffs, "how old is this place? A hundred years? A thousand?"

"Hard to say exactly," said Picard. "The Roman Legions used this pass. The monastery has records back to the 14th century, I understand."

"Ah! The monastery," Lebrun nodded. "How is it you expect to find your lost letter there?"

"Simple enough. It was sent by courier across the Alps from Paris to Parma. It left Paris. It didn't reach Parma." The professor gestured with his hand. "This is the most difficult part of the route. Here, if anywhere, the messenger perished."

"Or perhaps deserted," suggested Lebrun.

"Hardly. A man of good family—a de Laval. He was an *amant* of Josephine, I understand. A favorite at court. Why should he desert?"

"Perhaps he was too favored," Lebrun cocked an eyebrow. "Possibly the Emperor found him out."

"No," said Picard "—though this was the exception, rather than the rule, I admit. The Emperor knew nothing of *this* affair."

"I think," said Lebrun, "that you underestimate Napoleon. I'll wager he knew all along—and had your man dispatched across the Styx, instead of the Alps. But why argue gossip a hundred years old?" He relighted his cigar and poured more brandy. "Tell me, if your officer did perish crossing this pass, how will that permit you to find his message at the monastery?"

"All those who have died crossing here—from a snowfall, or losing their way and freezing or whatever—all those are still at the monastery."

"You mean they are buried there."

"No," insisted Picard. "They're *there.* Just as they died twenty—or two hundred—years ago. The temperature never goes above 0° at that altitude. It is too cold to dig, so the brothers store the bodies in a crypt of the abbey."

"And they never change?" Lebrun was incredulous.

"Never," said Picard. "They keep them accessible, so that anyone searching for a lost relative or friend can view them, but few are claimed. So the monks have a permanent—ever expanding—collection."

"Incredible!" said Lebrun. "And so you expect to find your courier there, eh?"

"Possibly. If he *is* there, we can recognize him quickly enough by his uniform. If not, we've had our holiday, and there's nothing lost."

"And meanwhile, there is always our host's magnificent brandy," injected Lebrun, reaching for the bottle. He poured two glasses and shoved one towards his companion.

THE men sat in silence, Lebrun relishing his cigar, Picard watching pictures in the fire. Outside the night winds swept down the hooded alpine peaks, past the inn, into the pass thousands of feet below.

Picard could almost hear the trumpets of the Roman legions echo in the night wind's howl. Had Napoleon's courier stopped at this same inn, he wondered? Perhaps rested before this very hearth? The worn planks of the floor had felt the tread of many feet—soldiers, pilgrims, wanderers of every sort.

None had had a more set purpose than the French scholar. None had been hastening towards a stranger meeting—a rendezvous with a courier a hundred years entombed, to receive a message from the hand of a dead Emperor.

Picard snapped back from his dreams of the past and finished his liquor with a quick sip. *"Alors,* Paul, our day starts early—and the guide will be impatient."

"Till tomorrow, then." Lebrun clapped his empty glass on the rough table. To-

gether they left the fire and started up the stone steps towards their rooms.

II

THE sun slanted strong rays across the snow as Picard, Lebrun and the guide reached the plateau between the peaks. They bent forward into the wind which swept down across the flat. Wearily they struggled toward the low stone building ahead.

A weather worn cross threw its warped shadow in their path as they neared the huge wooden doors of the hostel. Picard straightened up and grasped an iron ring set in the studded oak of the entrance. He pounded and the wind flung his knock into the silent building. The three waited, backs to the drifting snow.

They heard the bolts grind open and hastened to enter the shelter of the hallway when the door swung in. A rough robed monk bowed silently.

"Gruss Gott," said Picard. He spoke to the brother in a rude mountain dialect, then motioned to Lebrun and the guide to follow as the monk led them down the hallway. Their boots rang on the flagstones while the barefoot cleric led them down the darkened passage, crossing sombre halls beneath shadow shrouded beams.

The wind whistled through a fissure in the stone, bare feet padded between the cells, giving the only sounds of life in the thin air of the great altitude. They walked softly past the chapel where a murmur of never ending prayer rose to the ceiling and floated off on the wind to be carried out among the barren peaks.

Down a circular staircase they groped, feeling their way in the darkness over stones worn smooth by centuries of barefoot monks. At the foot of the stairs a sputtering candle prayed before the shrine of a mountain saint. Ahead, at the end of a tunnel, a flambeau licked fitfully at the frozen walls.

The torch hung above the door like a fiery spider in a web of shadow, as the brother reached up and withdrew it from the sconce on the wall. A club-like key hanging from his belt opened the lock and he bowed the three inside.

Picard led, as the three plunged into the darkness, halting a few feet inside the chamber. The monk pulled his key from the lock, lowered the torch beneath the archway and stepped into the cubicle. He walked to the center of the space, then raised his torch to let the light splash out against the walls.

"Sacre nom de Dieu!" gasped Lebrun.

The flickering torch of the silent monk threw blotches of light against the mute line of figures propped around the walls. It cut their silhouettes into the rough stone. In the dancing light they seemed to bow and bend and move in rhythm—a sombre saraband of silence.

Each person was caught in his final instant, a frozen pantomime of his last act of life. A hoary peasant in the corner tightened a cloak around his throat with frigid fingers, stooping to avoid a wind that died a hundred years ago.

The merchant just beside him had his goods still packed, and bent under the load with a last effort to follow the path he had died on. A child was clutched in frozen desperation. His mother's shawl, slipping back from her face, uncovered the hopeless eyes searching for rescue.

"You see, my friend," said Picard softly, "there are many ways to record history."

Lebrun was silent. His eyes traveled from a small boy, huddled with his arms around a dog, to a woodsman clutching an axe, then to a mountain climber whose alpenstock clawed at the bare wall.

The professor's searching glance stopped on a tall figure, at rigid attention against the far wall. An officer in the uniform of the Emperor. Picard walked over and peered at the captain, tenderly drawing back the moldy cloak. Beneath, a stiff leather dispatch case hung from the frozen shoulder. The professor struggled with the corroded catch, pried up the stiff flap and drew out a wad of parchment.

FOR a moment he stared up at the officer's face, staring sternly into the torch light as if he stood at a review by his Emperor—or his maker.

The captain's mouth had curled faintly, a chilling smile that belied the hardened eyes. Had death held a grim humor for this man, Picard wondered? Surely he had

seen death before—at Austerlitz or Jena. Did dying in the snow amuse him, then?—when he had expected a pistol ball between the eyes, perhaps?

Picard gently drew the cloak around the captain and turned to his companions. He nodded to the monk and the four backed from the chamber.

The sun was lower, now. The three men stepped out into the snow and the door closed silently behind them. Twilight threw a shadow of the monastery ahead of them as they started down the path. When passed beneath the crooked cross the wind rose up, as night crept on craftily.

III

THE innkeeper brought their after-dinner brandy to the inglenook. It was nearly eleven, and he excused himself—after making sure they had no other wants—locked the windows and carried his candle up the stairs.

Picard sat turning the folded parchment in his hands. Lebrun tapped his friend on the arm to bring his attention to the drink.

"One can't be too careful," he cautioned. "After you've finished your brandy we'll open the dispatch. Not before."

Picard sipped his drink quickly, examining the sealed letter all the while. The firelight etched the cracks in the ancient message and made the three seals stand out blood red against the parchment. They were genuine, these seals. Picard had seen the ring that had impressed them, under a dome of glass in the Invalides.

At last the professor drained his glass and probed at the flap of the packet with trembling fingers.

"Easy, *mon vieux,*" warned Lebrun. "Don't tear it in your haste." He got out a pocket knife and handed it to Picard.

"To think," said Picard, accepting the blade and inserting it beneath the fold, "we are about to read a message from Napoleon—a message undelivered for a hundred years!" He drew the blade carefully under the back fold, working slowly to preserve the seals. When the flap curled up he paused for a second.

"Imagine," he said, eyes gleaming behind his lenses, "we are the first to read this since it was written by . . ."

"Yes, yes," said Lebrun impatiently. "Let's get on with it. See what he says!"

Picard raised the flap and carefully unfolded the thick sheet. He laid it out across the table and smoothed the deep creases from the folds. The two bent over the document and scanned the flowing script.

They read to the bottom of the message, where a bold signature was scratched.

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Lebrun, slapping his friend across the shoulders. "So the Emperor knew nothing, eh?"

"Yes, yes, you were right, Paul," nodded Picard excitedly. "The Emperor was less of a fool than history imagined."

"Much less of a fool, *mon ami,*" chuckled Lebrun. "Much, much less." Still smiling, he read the dispatch aloud:

> "To his Excellency, the Duke of Parma:
> Dear Friend,
>
> You will take utmost pains to see that the bearer of this is not heard from again. I leave the choice means to you.
>
> N. Bonaparte.

"Fantastic!" said Picard. "Almost . . ." he turned his head at a harsh knock on the front door of the inn.

"Yes?" said Lebrun, rising to answer the knock. "A traveler at this hour? Nasty time to be wandering these paths—our visitor is lucky he didn't find himself calling at the monastery—for a longer visit!"

Lebrun strode across the room and shot back the bolt on the door. He lifted the latch and the wind pushed the door in on him, letting a cloud of snowflakes whirl into the hostel. In the doorway a tall figure was silhouetted against the crisp night sky.

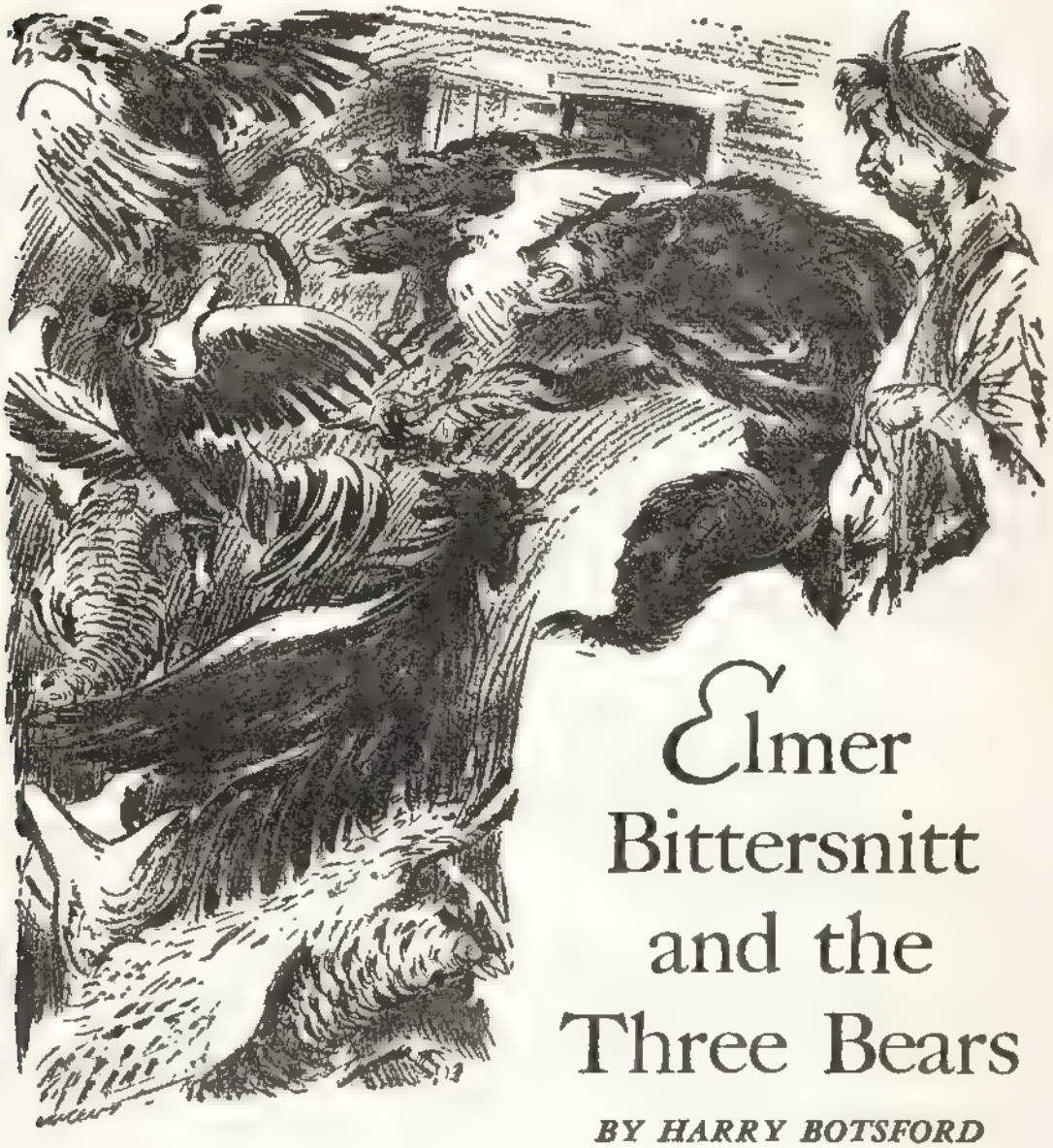
"Come in, quickly," said Lebrun, bunching his lapels over his breast. "You could use a bit of brandy, I think, after the cold?"

The figure stood stiffly on the threshold with its cloak billowing behind.

"Entrez!" commanded Lebrun, irritated. "Come in, before you freeze to death!"

"Thank you, no," said the man. He spoke with a cold politeness only possible in flawless French. "If you will forgive me the late hour—I have come only to get my dispatch."

Seems that Elmer and the bears were all bachelors.



Elmer Bittersnitt and the Three Bears

BY HARRY BOTSFORD

MR. WALT DUTTON chomped happily and vigorously at his breakfast. The fact that he was an uninvited guest failed to dampen a hearty enthusiasm for my cookery. An elderly and engaging rascal, completely devoid of hair and morals, he lived alone in a shack along the banks of Pine Creek. He was toothless, his chin retreated alarmingly, and his smile was guileless and disarming. Moreover, the truth was not in him.

He deftly rolled his final pancake into a cornucopia, filled it with clover honey, opened his mouth and delicately swallowed the entire project at one swift swoop. He wiped his chin free of a dribble of honey, grinned toothlessly through the open cabin door. "My cousin Elmer couldn't abide honey," he said. It was raining. It had rained all night. It would rain all day.

He shook his hairless head sadly. "No trout fishin' today," he opined. He rose

Heading by Vincent Napoli

from the table, nimbly ensconced himself in my favorite chair, reached for my tobacco, slowly tamped a heavy charge in an old and charred pipe. He lighted the pipe, drew deeply and with great content. The rheumy old eyes swung toward me and he smiled gently.

"My cousin Elmer Bittersnitt, he lived around here years ago," he said. "They was a bounty on him and he picked bird shot outen hisself for years. But, Elmer, onct a thin man, was fat as butter when he decided that there wasn't much future in living with three bachelor bears. Besides, he smole pretty high by the time he left these parts, and folks had put a price on him.'

I poured hot water over the breakfast dishes, sat down in the second-best chair of the cabin. Walt Dutton had a story festering in him, and I knew he wouldn't be happy until he had spun it. It would be improbable, and I said as much with some bitterness. I had listened to many of his tales.

THIS here story, Mr. Dutton said, is the gospel truth. I could bring in a dozen church-goin' people who would tell you so. Moreover, I'm a truthful man, always have been. There has been some which has doubted me, but when I confronted them with hundreds of citizens who testify as to my character, they shut up.

Elmer wasn't what you'd call real bright, even as a boy. He was married onct, but his wife insisted on him workin'. Besides, she had a passion for cats, critters Elmer couldn't abide. So he upped and ran away, got hisself a job in the oil fields down here, an easy job, you may be sure. He was a pumper and all he had to tend to was one well. That there well pumped by steam and she was on the beam, that is she was pumped by a wooden walking beam that teetered up and down. Elmer, he fired up the boiler, then just sat and watched. It was the kind of job Elmer liked.

Elmer had one great failin', and that's why the folks livin' in the Enterprise Valley finally put a bounty on him. Elmer just couldn't say no to any request, unless work was involved. Iffen he hadn't been such a spineless critter, he woulda said no to the three bachelor bears that he took up with onct.

Well, sir, one day I went to visit Elmer at his work. He had an easy job, lived in the boiler house. Elmer was a drinkin' man, same's I was in them days. I was overtook with thirst, and bein' without funds, I thought I'd visit Elmer and see if he had any drinkin' likker. Well, I come into the clearin' where the well was located and I saw a sight that near unnerved me, sufferin' as I was from a hangover.

On opposite ends of the walking beam there sat a big brown bear, their fur kinda dingy, but very happy they seemed as the walking beam teetered up and down. Sittin' on the steps of the boiler house was Elmer and another bear, slightly bigger than the other two. They had a jug between them and every onct in a while they would take a swig out of it. When this happened the two bears on the walking beam would grunt and growl and roar. It seemed they objected. I looked at them and I was convinced that they was far gone in spirits.

Elmer and the bear beside him seemed to be talkin' and gettin' along real cozy like. He looked up and saw me and grinned sort of foolish like. "Come on over, Walt," he says, "and have a snort and meet some friends of mine." I sort of edged over and Elmer hands me the jug and I was sorta nervous when I raised it up and took me a snort. Embarrassed, that's what I was, and maybe I took three or four good healthy snorts. I'd of taken more but I felt myself grabbed by two hairy paws and found myself facin' a mad and thirsty bear. The bear was makin' noises, too, as he grabbed the jug.

"He's sayin' you are a hog!" Elmer says. "You ain't to have no more, he says. Further, he opines you better git before the lads on the walkin' beam dismount, for they are both drunk and hungry, and they might not find a few bites of man meat distasteful."

I WAS about to argue the point, my courage havin' picked up considerable after the jolt of likker. But just then Orv Benedict, the man which had hired Elmer, came into the clearin'. He was a temperance man and he sniffed as he approached. Bein' nearsighted, he didn't notice the bears until he got pretty close. The big bear started toward

him, probably figgerin' here was another jug customer. Elmer, a little woozy, spoke to him and the bear stood stock still.

Then and there Orv Benedict caught the smell of spirits and saw the jug, and he knew Elmer had been drinkin'. A violent man, he fired Elmer on the spot, took a kick at the big bear and run fast for his buggy. If the big bear had been sober, he would have catched him, too. But the old man whipped up his horse and managed a get-away, hollerin' threats over his shoulder, his whiskers streamin' behind him in the wind.

Elmer shook his head sadly. "I gotta shut down the engine," he told me. "Then Sammy and Joseph will come down. If you are here, they will do harm to you. I suggest that you git. Me, I can control the big feller here. His name is Oscar. I call these here friends of mine by Bible names: Samuel, Joseph and Oscar. You gonna git?"

I got. It seemed to be the thing to do, me bein' a peaceful man. I wondered where Elmer had picked up his strange companions and what he would do, now he was fired. Elmer, if I knew him, would never resort to hard work unless he was pretty desperate and downright hungry and thirsty.

It wasn't long before I had the answers. About two years later when Elmer was a hunted man, I helped him escape and he told me the whole story, a most pitiful thing it was, too.

Seems Elmer and the three bears, all bachelors, sort of carefree and independent, took up residence in a big cave on the east side of Dunham Mountain. They was a rumor that Elmer set himself up a small still and that most of the time the four of them was pickled and reckless. When Elmer tole me about this, the tears ran down his face. "Sammy, Joseph and Oscar, they gathered the corn for me and you would be surprised at how active they could be, onct they knew what I wanted and how nice the juice tasted. Agin' the likker was something they couldn't understand. Once they knew how talented I was, my doom was sealed. They held a council of war, decided they would hold me captive."

It was sorrowful circumstances in which Elmer found himself. Oscar, in particular, had a nasty disposition, had a bad habit of

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cuffin' Elmer around a little, when things didn't go right. It seems the bears wanted Elmer to rig up another machine, one that could produce food, just as the still made likker. When he said it couldn't be done, they thought it was plumb ridiculous and said as much. Them bears, Elmer told me, had ravenous appetites. Besides they was lazy. They sort of sat in a circle around Elmer and demanded that he show them an easy way to catch food.

After a few swigs of likker, the situation grew acute. Elmer said all of a sudden he realized that if he didn't come up with the answer, they might eat him, and he didn't want that to happen.

THE thought came to him like a inspiration, he said. After all, he did know how to open doors, something no bear ever did know. Also, he had learned how to smash a lock, another trick bears couldn't understand. The first night they went out for a little forage, he led 'em straight to George Otto's farm. They snuck up to the barn and Elmer opened the door to the big sheep pen. The bears entered and what they done to them lambs was a caution. They ate what they wanted, tossed a few dead lambs over their shoulders and capered back to the cave, tellin' Elmer what a great man he was. For two days, Elmer feasted on lamb chops and roast leg of lamb, but when he tried to make a lamb stew, the bears sort of set their feet down and told him it was time for more food. Joseph, not a well bear, suffered from indigestion, and bein' sort of a choosy critter, opined that what he really needed was a nice mess of fish. Oscar sort of rared back on his heels, swallered a slug of the likker, smacked Elmer on the back and told him that he could also do with some fish.

Elmer was sorta stumped, but he was a resourceful man was Elmer, for he had lived on his wits for many years and he knew how to catch fish in wholesale lots. He tried to explain how this was done, but the bears had a little difficulty understanding it. What Elmer did is the thing that practically cleaned out all the trout in Pine Creek, and that's why you have such poor fishin' today. That night, carefully guarded by three bears, Elmer busted into the hardware store owned by Harry Mapes, at Pleasantville, and stole a box of dynamite. He carried the box with some pieces of fuse and detonators, down to Pine Creek, stopped at the riffles just above the deep Basin Pool. This was when that there pool was thick with big brook trout.

He stationed two of the bears on the banks of the pool, cautionin' them to hide behind rocks until he give the signal. The other bear, Oscar, tagged along to see that Elmer didn't escape. Elmer did what he knew pretty well. He tied three sticks of dynamite together, fused one of them, lit it and tossed it in the riffles. His timing was perfect; spang in the middle of the pool that dynamite let go. A minute later, the surface was covered with stunned and dead trout. Elmer and Oscar galloped down to the pool and the three bears went to work. They liked fish. Elmer grabbed three big fish, slipped them inside his shirt, went back to the dynamite, ready to take off. The bears seemed to understand that Elmer had committed himself so much that now he couldn't afford to escape. He whooped and hollered for the bears to stop their feastin', but they was three gluttons and kept scooping the fish out and eatin' them. They was so engaged when Henry Loveless, the game and fish warden, who had heard the explosion and suspected what had happened, came to the pool, fire in his eye. He yelled at the bears, informed them they had broken the law and to git to hell outen there. Joseph, now feeling better, resented the language, reached into the water and cuffed out a sucker that was two feet long. He flang this fish at Henry and it smacked him full in the face and he dropped to the ground very insensible.

Elmer knew he wouldn't stay that way very long, and he also knew that Henry Loveless always carried a shot gun with him when he was after violaters. The bears, stuffed and gorged with fish, came out of the water and joined Elmer and they started for the cave. It was a moonlight night and Henry Loveless waked up, mad as a wet hen. He saw the three bears and Elmer going up the mountain and he follered them a ways then he took aim and fired.

Elmer felt something sting him on the back, then in front. "I'm a gonner,"

he gasped, grabbing his stomach. "Shots went through me, my insides is hanging out." The bears looked down at Elmer, fishy sorrow on their faces, then Elmer suddenly realized what had happened. The shot had just broken the skin on his back. What he felt on the front was one of the stunned trout who had come alive and started to flop. They went back to the cave and the bears liked to kill themselves laughing at Elmer. Elmer said he felt real hurt about it, but he fried him a tidy mess of trout and felt better.

Meantime, Henry Loveless found his way back to town. He told folks what had happened, that Elmer Bittersnitt had sort of teamed up with three renegade bears. He had a bruise across his face where the sucker had hit him. But folks just refused to believe him. In fact, they accused him of lyin', and him as truthful a man as I be.

After that, every onct in a while, the bears insisted on fish and Elmer had to oblige. But, the worst blow came when the bears surrounded Elmer one night, deep in October and said they were really fond of chickens, ducks and turkeys, and how about getting some for them. By this time the bears was fat and sassy and their coats were full and rich. But, they was still lazy. Also, they had great confidence in Elmer. By this time, Elmer realized that he had painted hisself into a corner. The more food and delicacies he got for them bears, the more valuable he became. It looked like he was trapped for life. They forced him to pick pails of blackberries and huckleberries and when he didn't move real pert, Oscar, a hard taskmaster, would cuff him into action. Now they wanted some poultry. Matter of fact, Elmer felt he could eat some, too.

After that there was a series of raids on locked hen-houses and the carnage was terrific. Ducks, geese, turkeys, and chickens died by the dozens. One night, Elmer busted the lock on the chicken coop of Preacher Tobey and the old man looked out and saw Elmer motion for his companions to come in and help themselves. A pious man, but a man of courage, the old parson grabbed his shot gun, took aim at the group when they come out of the coop and fired. Oscar got most of the birdshot and he was highly uncomfortable for several days and personally blamed his troubles on Elmer. Never a bear with a sunny disposition, he got into the habit of cuffin' Elmer without reason, took joy in it. When I saw Elmer, his back was a patchwork of scratches.

Henry Loveless felt better, much better, once Preacher Tobey told his story. People came and looked at the tracks, sure enough, there was three bears and a man. Well, sir, that's when folk's started to rally around and offer a bounty for the capture and conviction of Elmer Bittersnitt. Elmer, while this was goin' on, was feasting on roast duck and fried chicken, dodgin' cuffs from Oscar.

ONE night Elmer went prowlin alone. The bears knew he would come back. He found that Missus Herrick, who used to live just over the hill over there, had baked seven mince pies that day and set 'em on the window sills to cool. Elmer always did have a likin' for mince pie. He sat down and ate two of them, took the rest back to the three bears. They tasted the pie and liked it real well. Elmer sort of thought old lady Herrick was a little too partial to cinnamon, but the bears didn't have his educated taste, so they didn't complain.

Within a few days, they told Elmer to go forth and fetch some more mince pies. He explained that Thanksgiving was past and it would be pretty hard to find any more mince pies. But their sweet teeth craved sweets. So Elmer, never a very smart boy, asked them did they like honey. They beamed on him, told him that they had often robbed bee trees of their honey, but it was a lot of work. Elmer, fool that he was, told them there was an easier way of getting honey. He told them about hives of bees, bustin' with honey in the farm yards and the bears fair drooled. That night, he took 'em to Orv Benedict's farm and showed 'em a neat row of hives. It was a warm November and the bees was real lively and pretty annoyed. The bears insisted that Elmer show them how to get the honey out of the hives. Elmer showed 'em, but he was stang pitiful and they had to lead him back to the cave. His face was swole real bad and they laughed and laughed at him, told him to hurry up and git well so they could do it again. Meantime, folks was annoyed

and they held meetin's and heisted the bounty on Elmer, a thing Elmer finally found out about when he picked up a newspaper.

End of November was cold, and the bears started to yawn. They insisted on one big meal before they hibernated for the cold weather. Elmer showed them how to snatch a freshly killed fat pig from the woodshed of a farm house. They feasted, and sleepily wiped the fat from their jowls. About half of the pig was left when they told him it was time for the Long Sleep. Elmer, while not as bright as some, had sort of foreseen this comin' up and had hidden some food from the bears. They almost closed up the mouth of the cave, made a bed of leaves, curled up and went to sleep. The bears was fat as butter, their coats were thick and in good shape, and as they snored, Elmer felt sort of proud of them.

He sliced off a mess of fresh pork, fried it and slept a little hisself. It wasn't a long winter, but by the time it was over, Elmer's hair and whiskers was real long and he wasn't too happy with his lot. Just before the bears wakened, Elmer ventured out one night to do a little prowlin'. His stock of food . s about gone. But, before he had gone two miles someone took a shot at him and he heard a dog barkin' on his trail. Elmer sort of took off, bein' able to run very fast. He hit this here crick and waded in the icy cold water for a half mile before he left it and took to the cave. The hound stood on the bank of the crick when he lost the scent and cried like a baby.

Elmer was real gloomy when the bears stretched and wakened. They was hungry, they told Elmer, about as hungry as three bears could be. They were united in a desire for a mess of fish. Elmer had part of the box of dynamite left, so they went down to Pithole Pool and Elmer dynamited it. They ate and grabbed fish and again took off for the cave. Elmer told me nothin' ever tasted as good as that mess of fried trout he cooked. Immediately, the bears seemed to feel better. They wanted a drink of likker.

When the snows came, Elmer had a small reserve of likker left, but durin' the cold nights, it sort of disappeared. He had to tell Joseph, Samuel and Oscar that there was none. They wanted to go out and gather corn, but Elmer explained they would have to wait a long time before the corn was planted and ripened, before it could be gathered for the little still. The bears mourned and mourned over this dreadful situation until Elmer spoke up. He wasn't, as I have said, a bright person. He told them about hotel bars and their eyes stuck out as they listened to him, and they licked their chops. There was a bar at the Eagle House in Pleasantville and Elmer, who likewise suffered from a thirst, told them he thought it could be safely raided. But, he was smart enough to tell them they would have to obey his orders and enter the bar late at night, just before it closed.

The three bears, still a little weak from their fast, were led to the outskirts of town. Elmer felt sorry for them, so while they waited, he stole a big chunk of salt pork from the meat market. It cut their hunger a little, but it also set up a ragin' thirst. At one minute of eleven, the bears, who had snuck down back streets, walked into the bar of the Eagle House. Max Bodine, a fat driller, was deep in his cups, talkin' to John Henderson, a rig-builder. They was the only customers in the bar at that unseemly hour. Bert Shaffer was behind the bar. They heard the bears enter, turned to see who it was, scarcely believing their eyes, thinkin' maybe what they saw was because of too much drink. Howthesoever, they both had the same idea, to git out of there. They lept through the window. Unfortunately, the window wasn't open at the time, but that didn't stop them. They hit the sidewalk runnin' and didn't stop until they got home. Both of them refused to tell their women folk why they was pantin' so hard.

BERT SHAFFER said it all happened fast, that he was cool and calm, but when Oscar and Samuel started to climb over the bar, he decided it was time to close the bar and git for home. He left, and as he went through the door, his legs churnin', Joseph give him a real smart cuff on the seat of his pants. Shaffer always said he heard a snicker at this time and it was probably true. Elmer was always one to titter at the misery of others.

An oil drilling crew reported the next

day that when they passed the bar at 1 o'clock, they saw an amazing sight: Elmer, whiskers to his waist, was sittin' on the bar, a bottle of brandy in his fist, while Joseph held a bottle of rum and Oscar and Samuel each had bottles of rye. Elmer was offering a toast to Liberty and the bears was uppin' their bottles and drinkin' deep and hearty. Samuel, usually a peaceful bear, a bear with sort of preacher blood in his veins, strolled over to the broken window. He staggered a little but he was alert. He saw the drillin' crew and he set up a big growl and started after them. They whipped up their team and just barely managed to escape.

Elmer practically wept when he told me what had happened when they got back to the cave. They was all pretty tipsy and the three bears insisted on singing a tune. Elmer said he didn't know the words or the music, but he sung real hard just the same. Samuel, now growed to be the biggest of the bears, the one Elmer had thought of as a sort of an elder statesman, talked a little more fluently than Oscar or Joseph. Clutching a bottle of cognac in his paws, the old fellow rocked and bellered with bear laughter. Between drinks, he told Elmer about the song. It was, Samuel said, a wooing song. True, the three bears had been happy and care-free bachelors for several years, but the likker had all of a onct convinced them that they should no longer live in single blessedness. In conclusion, Samuel said very solemnly, "Oscar has decided to go forth and sing all over the mountains. He is asking for four handsome brides. After all, my friend, you also sung the song and Oscar is convinced that you, too, seek a bear bride. He should be back in an hour."

Elmer, a shy man even if dumb, was horrified at the change that had taken place. He had no desire for a bear bride, and he visualized new bosses, more and more food to rustle, greater hardships in the future. He was in what you call a quandary. Samuel was far overtook by drink and Joseph sat in a corner, a foolish simper on his ugly face and fast asleep. From the mouth of the cave he could hear the clarion mating call of Oscar across the valley. He hoped that Oscar would git him a mate with an evil temper, a shrewish old girl with an appetite, a habit of cuffing her mate in moments of peevishness. He was forced to act, and fast.

At three in the morning, I was wakened by a horrible beatin' on the door of my shanty. I opened it a mite and there stood Elmer. He smole of likker and the fact that his clothes was in rags and on account he hadn't took a bath in a year. His hair and whiskers reached most to his waist and his eyes rolled in fear.

I LET him in and he told me what had happened. He wasn't happy about it. He had lost a good home. When the bears wakened the next morning, they would be sufferin' from hangovers and their tempers would be real touchy. They would find that their pal and provider Elmer had went. They would crave a drink. They knew that the man who could provide it would be Elmer. They had keen noses and they would track him down, not a hard thing to do considering how he smole. As his only living relative, would I hide him, give him a disguise, or help him escape.

I decided Elmer was the sort of a person you couldn't hide, any more than you could

hide a million pounds of limburger cheese. Best thing was to provide him with a disguise and tell him to git. I heated up a pail of water, gave him a mirror, a pair of shears and an old razor and a piece of soap. He took the stuff and a lamp into the woodshed and it took him nearly a half hour of steady cussing, much of which was done in the bear language, before he looked in. He had done a right good job, his hair was cropped short, his face clean-shaven, givin' him the look of a scared buck rabbit. I had heated a tub of hot water and made him help me carry it to the woodshed. I handed him a cake of scrubbing soap. "You take a bath, Elmer, a good bath, best disguise in the world!" "No! No! Not that, please," he begged. But I reached behind the door, grabbed my shot gun and sorta insisted that he take the bath. I supervised the bath, I might add, saw that it was thorough. He looked new and kinda shiny when he stepped from the bath. I tossed him a pair of old overalls, a shirt and a pair of shoes that didn't fit me.

"You take that tub of water and empty it down the gully," I told him. "Then you wrap up them old clothes and whiskers and hair and take them down into the gully and burn them up. When you come back, I'll have a drink for the road with you and a mess of side meat and pancakes and a cup of coffee. Then, Elmer Bittersnitt, you are gonna depart from these parts. No one will recognize you, with the whiskers and hair gone, with you smellin' as sweet as a posy. But, don't linger, just git far away from this neighborhood. I'm a respectable and a truthful man, and I don't want my reputation spoiled."

What a breakfast that man ate! He babbled that it was the first home meal he had ate since one morning he and the bears had scared the Fitts family away from the table and he had et the meal while the bears foraged for meat.

He didn't want to go, but when I reached for the gun he went.

WELL, sir, I never did see Elmer Bittersnitt again. Without Elmer to guide and instruct them, the three bears and their wives conducted themselves in a very orderly manner. Folks noted this, decided that in a moment of hunger or anger, the bears had et Elmer Bittersnitt, a deed they didn't consider as other than a great public service.

While I didn't see Elmer again, I did hear about him. Seems that he went back to his wife. Bein' a sentimental creature, she took pity on him, but she regarded him with great suspicion when he told her about his residence with the bears. She put him to work. They got along real good until one night the wife put a big plate of clover honey in front of Elmer. Maybe he had what do you call it, an allergy? Against honey, that is, for he had never forgotten what happened to him when he first took the bears honey-huntin'. Well, sir, Elmer Bittersnitt, at that moment, became a ravin', whoopin', hollerin' maniac, a very violent man, his wife wrote me.

There was only one thing she could do. She thought some of putting him out of his misery, but decided against it. She had him committed to North Warren, where the State takes care of them as are unhinged. He recovered almost immediate. But they kept him there, and he ate regular meals, had no work to do, slept in a clean bed every night. The other inmates, crazy as some of them was, knew he was crazy because he insisted on telling them about Oscar, Samuel and Joseph. He got into a fistfight with one man who insisted there wasn't anyone in the Bible named Oscar. You know Elmer wasn't a very bright man, but I often think maybe he was pretty smart after all. He ended up where everything was free, where he lived comfortable, too. I have been told that he knew where the cooks hid the lemon extract and would drop in and git hisself a big snort every onct in a while.

Mebbe Elmer was smarter than I took him for, what do you think?

Alethia Phrikodes

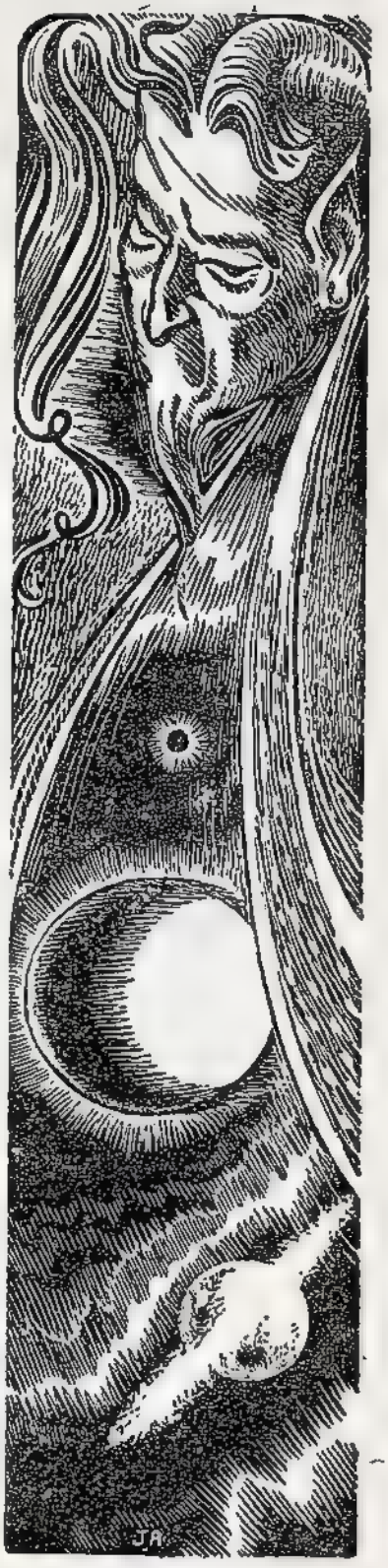
By H. P. LOVECRAFT

Omnia risus et omnis pulvis et omna nihil.

DEMONIAC clouds, up-piled in chasmy reach
Of soundless heaven, smothered the brooding night;
Nor came the wonted whisperings of the swamp,
Nor voice of autumn wind along the moor,
Nor muttered noises of the insomnious grove
Whose black recesses never saw the sun.
Within that grove a hideous hollow lies,
Half bare of trees; a pool in centre lurks
That none dares sound; a tarn of murky face,
(Though naught can prove its hue, since light of day,
Affrighted, shuns the forest-shadowed banks.)
Hard by, a yawning hillside grotto breathes
From deeps unvisited, a dull, dank air
That sears the leaves on certain stunted trees
Which stand about, clawing the spectral gloom
With evil boughs. To this accursed dell
Come woodland creatures, seldom to depart:
Once I beheld, upon a crumbling stone
Set altar-like before the cave, a thing
I saw not clearly, yet from glimpsing, fled.
In this half-dusk I meditate alone
At many a weary noontide, when without
A world forgets me in its sun-blest mirth.
Here howl by night the werewolves, and the souls
Of those that knew me well in other days.
Yet on this night the grove spake not to me;
Nor spake the swamp, nor wind along the moor,
Nor moaned the wind about the lonely eaves
Of the bleak, haunted pile wherein I lay.
I was afraid to sleep, or quench the spark
Of the low-burning taper by my couch.
I was afraid when through the vaulted space

Of the old tower, the clock-ticks died away
Into a silence so profound and chill
That my teeth chattered—giving yet no sound.
Then flickered low the light, and all dissolved
Leaving me floating in the hellish grasp
Of bodied blackness, from whose beating wings
Came ghoulish blasts of charnel-scented mist.
Things vague, unseen, unfashioned, and unnamed
Jostled each other in the seething void
That gaped, chaotic, downward to a sea
Of speechless horror, foul with writhing thoughts.
All this I felt, and felt the mocking eyes
Of the cursed universe upon my soul;
Yet naught I saw nor heard, till flashed a beam
Of lurid lustre through the rotting heavens,
Playing on scenes I laboured not to see.
Methought the nameless tarn, alight at last,
Reflected shapes, and more revealed within
Those shocking depths that ne'er were seen before;
Methought from out the cave a demon train,
Grinning and smirking, reeled in fiendish rout;
Bearing within their reeking paws a load
Of carrion viands for an impious feast.
Methought the stunted trees with hungry arms
Groped greedily for things I dare not name;
The while a stifling, wraith-like noisomeness
Filled all the dale, and spoke a larger life
Of uncorporeal hideousness awake
In the half-sentient wholeness of the spot.
Now glowed the ground, and tarn, and cave, and trees,
And moving forms, and things not spoken of,
With such a phosphorescence as men glimpse
In the putrescent thickets of the swamp
Where logs decaying lie, and rankness reigns.
Methought a fire-mist draped with lucent fold
The well-remembered features of the grove,
Whilst whirling ether bore in eddying streams
The hot, unfinished stuff of nascent worlds
Hither and thither through infinity
Of light and darkness, strangely intermised;
Wherein all eternity had consciousness,
Without the accustomed outward shape of life.
Of these swift circling currents was my soul,
Free from the flesh, a true constituent part;
Nor felt I less myself, for want of form.
Then cleared the mist, and o'er a star-strown scene
Divine and measureless, I gazed in awe.
Alone in space, I viewed a feeble fleck
Of silvern light, marking the narrow ken
Which mortals call the boundless universe.
On every side, each as a tiny star,
Shone more creations, vaster than our own,
And teeming with unnumbered forms of life;
Though we as life would recognize it not,

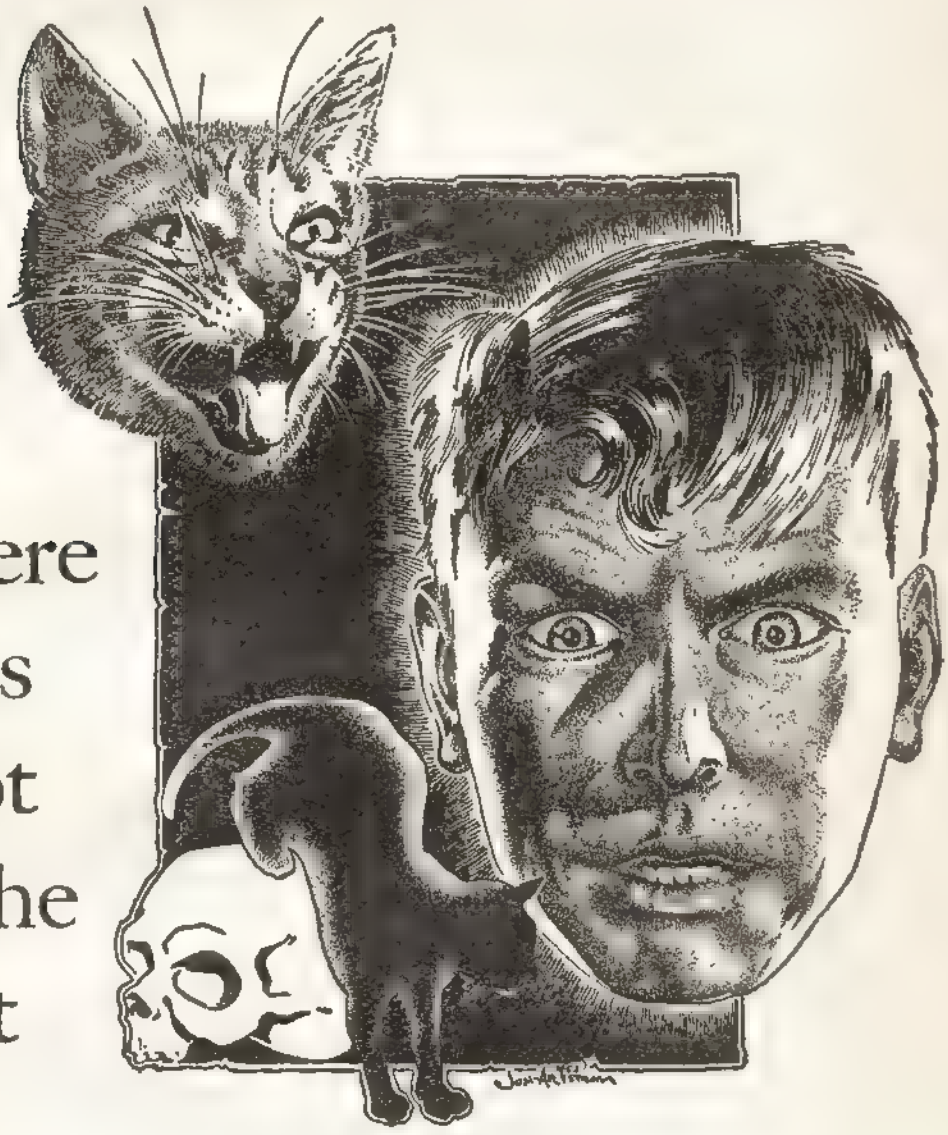
Being bound to earthy thoughts of human mouls.
As on a moonless night the Milky Way
In solid sheen displays its countless orbs
To weak terrestrial eyes, each orb a sun;
So beamed the prospect on my wondering soul;
A spangled universe, rich with twinkling gems,
Yet each a mighty universe of suns.
But as I gazed, I sensed a spirit voice
In speech didactic, though no voice it was,
Save as it carried thought. It bade me mark
That all the universes in my view
Formed but an atom in infinity;
Whose reaches pass the ether-laden realms
Of heat and light, extending to far fields
Where flourish worlds invisible and vague,
Filled with strange wisdom and uncanny life,
And yet beyond; to myriad spheres of light,
To spheres of darkness, to abysmal voids
That know the pulses of disordered force.
Big with these musings, I surveyed the surge
Of boundless being, yet I used not eyes,
For spirit leans not on the props of sense.
The docent presence swelled my strength of soul;
All things I knew, but knew with mind alone.
Time's endless vista spread before my thought
With its vast pageant of unceasing change
And sempiternal strife of force and will;
I saw the ages flow in stately stream
Past rise and fall of universe and life;
I saw the birth of suns and worlds, their death,
Their transmutation into limpid flame,
Their second birth and second death, their course
Perpetual through the aeons' termless flight,
Never the same, yet born again to serve
The varying purpose of omnipotence.
And whilst I watched, I knew each second's space
Was greater than the lifetime of our world.
Then turned my musings to that speck of dust
Whereon my form corporeal took its rise;
That speck, born but a second, which must die
In one brief second more; that fragile earth;
That crude experiment; that cosmic sport
Which holds our proud, aspiring race of mites
Whom ignorance in empty pomp adorns,
And misinstructs in specious dignity;
Those mites who, reasoning outwarn, vaunt themselves
As the chief work of Nature, and enjoy
In fatuous fancy the particular care
Of all her mystic, super-regnant power.
And as I strove to vision the sad sphere
Which lurked, lost in ethereal vortices;
Methought my soul, tuned to the infinite,
Refused to glimpse that poor atomic blight;
That misbegotten accident of space;



That globe of insignificance, whereupon
(My guide celestial told me) dwells no part
Of empyreal virtue, but where breed
The coarse corruptions of divine disease;
The festering ailments of infinity;
The morbid matter by itself called man:
Such matter (said my guide) as oft breaks forth
On broad Creation's fabric, to annoy
For a brief instant, ere assuaging death
Heal up the malady its birth provoked.
Sickened, I turned my heavy thoughts away.
Then spake the eternal guide with mocking mien,
Upbraiding me for searching after Truth;
Visiting on my mind the searing scorn
Of mind superior; laughing at the woe
Which rent the vital essence of my soul.
Methought he brought remembrance of the time
When my fellows to the grove I strayed,
In solitude and dusk to meditate
On things forbidden, and to pierce the veil
Of seeming good and seeming beauteousness
That covers o'er the tragedy of Truth,
Helping mankind forget his sorry lot,
And raising hope where Truth would crush it down
He spake, and he ceased, methought the flames
Of fuming Heaven revolved in torments dire;
Whirling in maelstroms of rebellious might,
Yet ever bound by laws I fathomed not.
Cycles and epicycles of such girth
That each a cosmos seemed, dazzled my gaze
Till all a wild phantasmal glow became.
Now burst athwart the fulgent formlessness
A rift of purer sheen, a sight supernal,
Broader than all the void conceived by man,
Yet narrow here. A glimpse of heavens beyond;
Of weird creations so remote and great
That even my guide assumed a tone of awe.
Borne on the wings of stark immensity,
A touch of rhythm celestial reached my soul;
Thrilling me more with horror than with joy.
Again the spirit mocked my human pangs,
And deep reviling me for presumptuous thoughts;
Yet changing now his mien, he bade me scan
The widening rift that clave the walls of space;
He bade me search it for the ultimate;
He bade me find the Truth I sought so long;
He bade me brave the unutterable Thing,
The final Truth of moving entity.
All this he bade—but my soul,
Clinging to live, fled without aim or knowledge,
Shrieking in silence through the gibbering deeps.

It might seem that Jude was mad. But the others saw it too. There's no getting around the fact that there was soot on the cat.

There Was Soot on the Cat



BY SUZANNE PICKETT

A CHILL wind bristled through the trees and tugged at my hat as I walked through the cold, brooding air. Good to get out after four weeks of feverish cutting, revising and polishing on what I hoped would be "The great American novel."

Back to the office tomorrow. I smiled at the thought. But I would have smiled at anything. A cold wind always exhilarated me. Something in me seemed kin to the fierceness of the wind.

Coming to an old, deserted-looking road I turned into it, walked a few feet then slackened my pace and looked up in surprise. Queer that the air should feel so strange all at once. The road seemed lost between old, gnarled oaks, tall pines and thick underbrush. The actual thick, murky feel of horror seemed to emanate from it.

Heading by Jon Arfstrom

"This is what comes of too hard concentration," I muttered. But a minute ago I had been happy, exhilarated—I shivered in the gloom and listened to the ceaseless murmur of the pines and the dismal creaking of the oaks. Impelled onward by some strange force in spite of my frantic desire to go back I stepped over rocks and gullies in the road, hesitated, shivered and walked on again until I came to an old house set back from the road. The horror jumped at me as I looked at the house; yet it was pleasant to the eyes, situated on a small hill, picturesque with its gables and high windows.

Unable to move, I stood still a minute. Then I heard a car behind me, looked back and saw a jeep bounding over the ditches and rocks.

Caught by a movement on the roof my eyes returned to the house. Scrabbling and clawing, a huge, tiger-striped cat clambered down the roof and bounded to the road at my feet. Crouching before me, he looked at me with almost human eyes; large, yellow-green, with a dark rim around the iris.

His yellow coat was covered with soot!

There was knowledge in those eyes and a look—but don't let me speak of that look. Then he, too, noticed the jeep. With a cry that ended in a squeal, he tried to escape it. I shuddered as his life was crunched out beneath the wheels.

The jeep swerved, roared and stopped. I knew the driver, a nearby farmer, Mase Oliver. He climbed to the ground. In spite of the chill in the air, drops of sweat stood on his face. His hand trembled as he mopped his upper lip. "I don't like cats," he said to me, his eyes almost the color of the iron gray of his hair. "I am glad when I kill one, but that cat—" He looked at the animal and his lips tightened. "Did you see his eyes?"

We stood silent, both looking at the cat, just a dead beast now, then he turned to me. "By the way," he remarked. "Seen Henson lately?"

"Who?" I asked.

"Jude Henson."

"Never heard of him."

"He lives here. Thought you might be going there." His eyes had a worried look. "Want to go with me?"

"Well—" I hesitated. I wasn't in the mood to meet a strange man.

"I wish you would," Oliver said. He looked at me as if I might be some sort of new species. "You a writer, ain't you?"

"Well—yes." I wondered what that had to do with it.

"Him too," Oliver pointed to the house. "Raised here. Paw used to own this place. Always was a queer kid. He come to me about a month back, asked to rent the old place, said he wanted to write." There was the contempt of the man who works in the good honest soil for anyone who would waste his time on words. Then the worry was back in Oliver's voice again. "Henson got milk and butter at my house, we ain't seen him for a week, so I come down to ask was anything wrong."

"Gone somewhere," I suggested. I didn't want to enter that house. "There's no smoke."

"Heats with oil."

"Well—I'll go with you," I said quickly. At least I'd meet the man.

OLIVER rapped on the door and waited a minute. The house seemed to wait too. He knocked again, this time louder. Still no sound within. Suddenly he shook the knob. It turned and the door moved slightly. It wasn't locked, but something, a bar or latch, held it.

"He must be there," Oliver said. "Door's barred on the inside." He was a big man with thick, ruddy skin. I noticed that he had paled. We looked at each other. "Let's try the back," I said. I felt pale too. There was something about that house. We must get inside.

The back door was barred too.

We tried the windows. They were locked, the shades drawn. "Something wrong inside." Oliver mopped his face.

"Yes," I answered.

"I'm going." I held the screen wide and he hurled himself at the door. It creaked and gave. He stumbled inside and I followed.

The living room and large kitchen were empty. Dirty dishes littered the table, a greasy skillet, egg shells and empty milk bottles.

"Not very neat," I remarked.

We crossed the hall into the front bedroom. It was empty. Oliver looked at me as I glanced his way. "Well," his voice shook, "there's one more room."

"Yes," I muttered and looked at the door. I knew, and he knew. Something was in that room.

Finally, he opened the door. He jerked to a stop, then stumbled back, his soundless lips moving.

"What is it?" I asked holding his arm. He tried to control his lips and speak, but still no sound came. Finally he pointed to the door.

As a "Sob Sister," I have covered fire, theft, murder, disaster, but nothing could prepare me for the "thing" I beheld. The sunken eyes, the pitifully clawing outstretched hands, the horror in the eyes of the grinning corpse on the floor.

I was worse than Oliver. I couldn't even move. I could only stand and stare. The room was a wreck. The curtains torn, a chair overturned, some crockery broken. But, gentlemen, there was not a sign of violence on the face of the man. Not a scratch, not a bruise. Later, when the body was examined, there was not found anywhere any evidence of injury. That he had died of terror was evident. What had caused the terror was unknown. "He must have gone mad," was the verdict of the doctors.

Perhaps I did wrong. Well, I'll let you decide. But I alone saw the diary lying open. I read the last page, picked it up and put it in my pocketbook.

That night I read it.

IT HAS been a month now.

Perhaps I am going mad. The boys at the office can't understand my sudden fear of cats. Before my vacation it was I who brought milk to the office cat, I who gave him cheese, rubbed his back in the way he loved. Now if he comes near me—But I'm getting away from the diary. This is what I read:

THE DIARY

Well, it began, the perfect crime at last. Nice looking man too from his pictures Fey (what a name for a man) Fey Brandon. Dead by person or persons unknown, shot once through the heart on a lonely, country road. Yes, the gun was found and identified. It was stolen a few days before from a pawnshop in Birmingham. The theft had been reported, but neither the owner of the shop, nor the customer who looked at the gun could describe the man who came in as they crossed the aisle to look at a watch. When they came back, the man was gone, so was the gun.

I don't know what there was about Brandon. Irene Sharp was—well almost the prettiest girl I ever saw. I was crazy about her and thought she loved me. But one day I ran across her in the park with a strange man. From behind an azalia bush I watched them. If I had been a dog my bristles would have risen. There was something about the fellow's eyes—they were large, yellow-green with a dark rim around the iris. His hair was a tawny yellow, streaked by the sun. I noticed the ripple of smooth muscles under his thin, sport shirt, and his walk was beautiful, graceful, catlike.

As they moved away he looked down at her and laughed. I could have killed them both—and I never spoke to Irene again. She called me a few times, wondered what was wrong, but I wouldn't give her the satisfaction of knowing that I cared.

And then I didn't want Brandon, yes, it was Brandon with her, I didn't want him to gloat over me. I hated his eyes, I could have cut them out. When I saw him—and I was always running into him, I shuddered as I looked at him.

He pretended that I was a stranger, never seemed to notice me. But I knew, all the time I knew he was laughing inside.

I hadn't gone with Ruth Clearwell a month until she mentioned the new man in town, Fey Brandon. We never had so much fun before. I spent every penny I had, and Ruth was gay, bright. "You know," her voice was husky as I kissed her good night. "I didn't know that you could be so—so sweet and so nice."

I never spoke to her again.

And then I met Margot and learned why God made us male and female. Little she was, gay and golden. Like sunshine, and as pure, with the clear blue eyes of an angel.

Margot loved me too, then suddenly she

changed. She wouldn't see me, wouldn't talk over the telephone. I didn't know what was wrong. One day I cornered her in the library, and for some reason I glanced at the book she was reading. "Fey," she had written. "Fey Brandon."

"Margot!" I said, trying to whisper above the rage in my heart. "Margot, do you know this man?"

"Yes," she said dreamily. "You know, Jude, there's something about him. He has the strangest eyes—"

I tried to reason with her. She laughed at me, then grew angry. When she left me I was exhausted. Somehow, I managed to get home. I was sick for a month, couldn't eat and couldn't sleep.

Then one afternoon Margot's picture stared at me from the paper. Oh God! it couldn't be! But she was—Margot was dead! She and Fey Brandon had been riding down the Montgomery Highway. Margot was driving, the paper said, and Brandon was thrown from the car. Except for a bruise or two he was unhurt, but Margot—I closed my eyes. This is what Brandon had done for her.

I can't remember anything for three days. I must have acted all right as no one said anything later. I was able to go to work the day after Margot's funeral. No one knew that I had loved her or that I had ever seen Brandon. I didn't dare ask about him, but that is when I stole the gun.

FATE has been kind to me. I was driving a few miles from town one day when I saw and recognized that tawny head, that feline walk. I pulled into the side road he had just taken and followed slowly until out of sight of the main road, then I eased up behind him and stopped the car. "I'd like to speak to you a minute," I addressed Brandon. I knew enough to avoid his eyes.

"Of course," he answered. I drew the gun and pointed it at him.

"My God!" he said harshly. "What do you mean?"

"This is for Irene and Ruth and Margot," I said calmly feeling neither tremor nor excitement.

"But you can't do it." His voice was calm now, purring, and my hand began to shake.

"I'm going to do it." I tried to keep my voice as calm as his.

"But you can't kill me," he insisted. "I've done nothing to you, I don't even know you. Look at me, man!"

I kept my eyes over the spot that covered his treacherous heart.

"You know," he said, his voice growling in his throat. "Surely you know what will happen to you if you do this thing."

As I pulled the trigger I looked at his eyes. They blazed at me and glowed. Green fire darted from them. It was too late to stop my hand, I saw his eyes as the bullet hit. Two demons from the darkest hell looked at me from them, then they grew blank as he sank to the ground.

I had not seen it before, but as he fell a large, tawny, tiger-striped cat came down the road. Suddenly the cat screamed, arched his back and enlarged his tail. For one paralyzing minute he looked at me with large, blazing, yellow-green eyes. Eyes whose irises wore a dark ring. Two demons looked at me from those eyes as I jumped into my car and roared away.

The cat sprang and missed me by less than an inch.

I traveled a mile, took a road that turned back to the highway and came home.

A MONTH has passed. There's only occasional mention of the murder (they call it murder) but my nerves are growing bad. Oh no, it's not him! Every day I grow more glad that I killed him. The gun was found the day that Brandon was found. Fortunately, I had presence of mind to wipe it carefully before I hurled it into the woods. Also it rained that day and there were no car tracks on the gravel road.

Now, every time I see a beautiful girl I think, perhaps you owe me a lot. Perhaps you would have been his next victim. So I'm not sorry I killed him. I'd be almost glad if they found me, but fate who delivered him to me seems to will otherwise. It's only these devil-begotten cats. These green-eyed demons from hell that pursue me. I never knew before there were so many large, tawny, tiger-striped cats. Everywhere I go I see one.

I am afraid to be alone.

I have decided to leave the city. There is

a farm where I lived as a boy. Perhaps I can rent it and get away from these damned cats.

THREE weeks of warm, pure beauty, spring almost here. Three weeks of rest. The hills are beautiful, and the trees are beginning to show tiny signs of spring. My walk to farmer Oliver's twice a week is pleasant. I think I'll go home tomorrow. My nerves are calm, everything is wonderful. I haven't seen a cat here.

Later . . . Let me see again if the windows are all barred.

Yes, they are fastened! Nothing can get in! Nothing. I tell you! What was that? It's that—that cat. Yes, he has found me. This morning when I started out for Oliver's he sprang at me. His green eyes blazed and he just missed me. I managed to slam the screen as he hit the floor, but I dropped my key outside. One of his paws was inside the screen before I could latch it. Oh God, he is strong! He almost tore open the door, yelling and spitting at me horribly, then his eyes caught mine.

Yes, I'll admit it at last. They are Fey's exactly. And I—I still shudder to think of it—I almost opened the door to him. Somehow I managed to close and bar it and then I barred all of the windows.

But he has stalked me all day. Whichever room I am in he is outside the window, mewing and scrabbling to enter.

Next day . . . What a horrible night! I'm weak and tired I ate nothing all day yesterday. My shade will not stay down and every time it raises to the top there are those demon-possessed eyes gleaming at me.

Two days later. I thought I almost escaped today. I saw him enter the woods across the road, and cautiously opened the door only to spring back. A coiled rattlesnake darted his fangs at me. (It had been warm, he must have left his den. It is raining and turning cold now.) I had heard Fey . . . the cat . . . dragging the rattler onto the porch. There had been a peculiar whipping and slithering noise mixed with low growls. Were they conversing? Are all the demons in league with him? As I slammed the door the monster came bounding across the road to renew his efforts to get in.

Next night . . . I'm going mad. I know he can't get in. He can't! Yet he continues to scrabble and howl at my window. Why can't I eat? He can't get in. . . . Why don't I go out and face him?

But I have no gun. I threw it away.

If he should touch me! I can't face him.

Oh my God! Oh Margot!

He is outside my window. But he can't get in I tell you. He can't!

He is quiet now. Am I to get some sleep? He has been prowling the yard but he is quiet now. And I am writing. . . . But tired. . . . So tired.

What was that?

Soot! Falling down the chimney!

He can't get in I tell you!

But he is! He's coming down the chimney!

Oh my God! He's coming down the chimney!

Black Candles

By YETZA GILLESPIE

WHEN the black candles of the night
Are set again before time's portal,
The ancient ones—the furry-footed,
And such of these as being mortal
Yet have at heart a space of midnight
Lit by old stars they never saw,
Find an old path along the margin
And follow it past proven law,
Back to the sphinx, the pyramids
Of mystery and old delight,
A way that only can be found
By the black candles of the night

The Green Parrot

BY JOSEPH PAYNE BRENNAN

SOME years ago, finding that urban interruptions were threatening to prevent my completion of a new novel on the deadline set by the publishers, I moved back to a room at the Winford Inn where I had spent the previous summer. Winford, a tiny village tucked in the northern Connecticut hills, offered very few formidable interruptions.

I arrived at the Inn during October and worked steadily until late November. At length, well pleased with my progress, I decided to take a day off.

I got into my car and drove rather aimlessly around the countryside, admiring the scenery and in general enjoying myself. Although most of the leaves were down, and in certain lights the cold hills looked rather bleak, I felt that the little excursion was doing me a world of good.

Late in the afternoon, as I was approaching Winford, looking forward to a quiet evening in my cozy room at the Inn, I turned down a narrow dirt road which branched off the main route and was reputed to be a shortcut.

I immediately regretted it. The road was in a bad state of disrepair and was crowded on both sides by large overhanging hemlock trees whose branches scraped against the car.

"Here, Toby—" the old lady called to the parrot among snowy New England hemlocks.

Heading by Lee Brown Coye

I was just about to switch on the car lights when a large green parrot suddenly flew out of the hemlocks on one side of the road, fluttered frantically away from the windshield, and disappeared under the trees on the other side.

I was so startled I very nearly ran the car off the road. Braking to a stop, I sat staring into the woods, wondering if my eyes were playing tricks on me. If a pheasant, or woodcock, or hawk, had flapped across the road, I might have been momentarily startled, but no more. But a large green parrot, in New England, late in November. . . .

I was still scowling into the woods, when a cracked and quavering voice began calling out plaintively, "Here Toby! Here Toby!"

At first I thought it might be the parrot; then I saw a little old lady appear out of the hemlocks and step into the road. She looked around uncertainly, while a most woebegone expression came over her wrinkled face. In her shapeless housedress and

funny little poke bonnet she made an odd and pathetic figure.

I got out of the car and approached her. "Your parrot," I said, "just flew across the road. He went toward the woods." And I pointed toward the clump of hemlocks where I guessed he had headed.

SHE stood stone still and stared at me. Apparently she hadn't even noticed my car. Finally a slow unfathomable smile wrinkled her face.

Her faded eyes sought my own. "Help me," she whispered. "Help me find Toby. I've been trying to catch him so long. I'm so tired."

It was impossible for me to refuse. Her pale eyes held such a piteous appeal—and she was so old and frail and helpless-looking.

"You'd better wait here," I said. "I'll see if I can catch him."

Without waiting for her reply, I plunged into the hemlocks. I knew there was little time to spare. It was already twilight under the trees; in another hour the forest would be dark.

I began calling the parrot by name: "Here Toby! Here Toby!"

From far away in the woods a faint, mocking echo came back, "Here Toby! Here Toby!"

Once I thought I caught a glimpse of the bird, high up on a branch in one of the hemlocks. But I couldn't be sure. It might have been merely a last ray of sunlight glinting briefly against a green bough.

As I moved away from the road, the hemlock wood became denser. The trees grew closer together: briars and underbrush barred the way.

Darkness closed in more swiftly than I had thought possible. With it, came cold. In spite of my exertions, I began to shiver.

When I finally stopped to catch my breath, I was, for the first time, struck with the absurdity of the situation.

Here I found myself, at twilight, scrambling through brambles and briars deep in a hemlock wood which stretched for miles—in search of an escaped parrot whose owner I didn't even know!

I shrugged and turned to retrace my footsteps. While I hated to go back and admit my failure to the little old lady in the poke bonnet, I felt that I could accomplish nothing by searching further. In a very short time it would be impossible to see anything at all in the woods.

In a few minutes, however, I pretty much forgot about facing the old lady—because I realized that I was lost. I hadn't gone far from the road, but for the life of me I couldn't find it again.

IT GOT completely dark and became extremely cold. I lost all sense of direction and although I kept assuring myself that I couldn't possibly be *very* far from the road, a kind of panic began building up in me. My thin topcoat was not, I knew, designed for overnight wear in cold November woods.

At length, purely by accident, I stumbled into the road. Luckily, the car was not far away. I climbed into it, stiff and literally aching with cold, and started the motor.

As I had expected, the little old lady had left. Probably she had gone home far more concerned about the loss of her parrot than about my own failure to reappear.

Back at the Inn, I took a hot bath, changed clothes, drank two tumblers of brandy—and made the dining room only a few minutes late.

As had been my custom since returning to the Inn, I seated myself at the table which I usually shared with Colonel Buff, Miss Grover and old Mrs. Spence.

When Colonel Buff joshed me about my late arrival, my first impulse was to answer testily. I held my temper however, and presently when the brandy and warm food began to take effect, I decided to reveal the entire ridiculous episode from which I had so recently emerged.

I determined to relate the bizarre incident without—and it was a temptation—adding any trimmings or melodramatic trappings of my own invention.

I soon saw however, that, oddly enough, even without embroidery my little narrative was producing an extraordinary stir. From the very start, when I first mentioned the parrot, Colonel Buff stopped eating and laid down his fork as if he didn't want to risk missing a single word. I thought old Mrs. Spence turned somewhat pale, and

Miss Grover appeared unaccountably agitated. She mumbled something about snow and kept glancing at the windows.

I FINISHED amid a strained silence. At length, Colonel Buff, after exchanging pregnant glances with Mrs. Spence and Miss Glover, cleared his throat.

"My lad," he said, "this is as good a time and place as any for you to be informed of a very peculiar and pertinent fact about your, ah, experience."

"What fact is that?" I inquired.

"You must be prepared to be startled."

"Well . . . ?

"The fact is," he continued, "that the two chief protagonists in your recent experience—excluding yourself, of course—were—ghosts."

He nodded his head at my expression of blank amazement and disbelief.

"I know it must seem incredible to you," he went on, "but that little old lady in the poke bonnet disappeared in those hemlock woods eighty-odd years ago."

Mrs. Spence nodded, shivering. "It's a well known story hereabout," she said. "Leastways, it is to the old folks."

After dessert, Colonel Buff lit a cigar and settled back to tell the "well known" local story which I had never heard. I had, meanwhile, eaten my remaining food in such a state of suspense that I hardly tasted a morsel of it.

"The little old lady in the poke bonnet," the Colonel began, "was a spinster named Miss Meerchum. At one time her people were moderately prosperous farmers. They occupied a large tract of land bordering the hemlock woods on that dirt road which you came over.

"Well, to make a long story short, the Meerchums gradually died off until finally only old Miss Meerchum was left. She continued to live on in the farmhouse, eking out a sparse existence.

"Her only solace was a large green parrot which she kept as a pet. Being alone in the world, she became inordinately attached to the bird. It was said—and this is probably sheer nonsense—that the bird could carry on a sustained conversation and that old Miss Meerchum held lengthy gossip sessions with it. In any case, Miss Meerchum undoubtedly valued the parrot above everything else in her world.

"Well, one dismal day in late November, in the year 1868 to be exact, Miss Meerchum came stumbling into Winford in a vastly agitated state. Tearfully, she explained to the villagers that Toby, her pet parrot, had escaped into the hemlock woods. She pleaded for help in locating the prized bird.

"The local menfolk, deeply touched by her piteous appeal, organized a searching party and plunged into the woods in an attempt to retrieve the aged woman's companion.

"When they started out, the skies were somewhat overcast but there seemed no threat of imminent storm. The party—men and boys—struck boldly into the hemlocks. Apparently the search, in the beginning, was considered something of a lark.

"Toward evening however, when more than half of the searchers were still far in the woods, a blinding snowstorm struck. It quickly turned into a raging blizzard. A terrific wind roared through the forest, drowning out all other sound.

"Those men and boys who had already come out of the woods were forced to return to town in order to save themselves. There was no possibility of attempting to save the others. Some of them were not found until the following spring. In all, seven men and four boys perished in the hemlock woods."

"And the old lady?" I inquired after a long silence.

"Contrary to instructions," the Colonel said, "she followed some of the searchers into the woods, calling out for her beloved parrot. She perished with the others, and to this day her poor bones have never been located. They still lie somewhere in those woods—and whatever might remain of the parrot lies there also, for it, too, was never found."

THE Colonel relit his cigar. "Since that tragedy over eighty years ago, at least a dozen different people, at different times, have reported an encounter with the little old lady in the poke bonnet. Always in the fall of the year. And, invariably, not many hours after their meeting with the pathetic

apparition, a severe snowstorm has settled on the area."

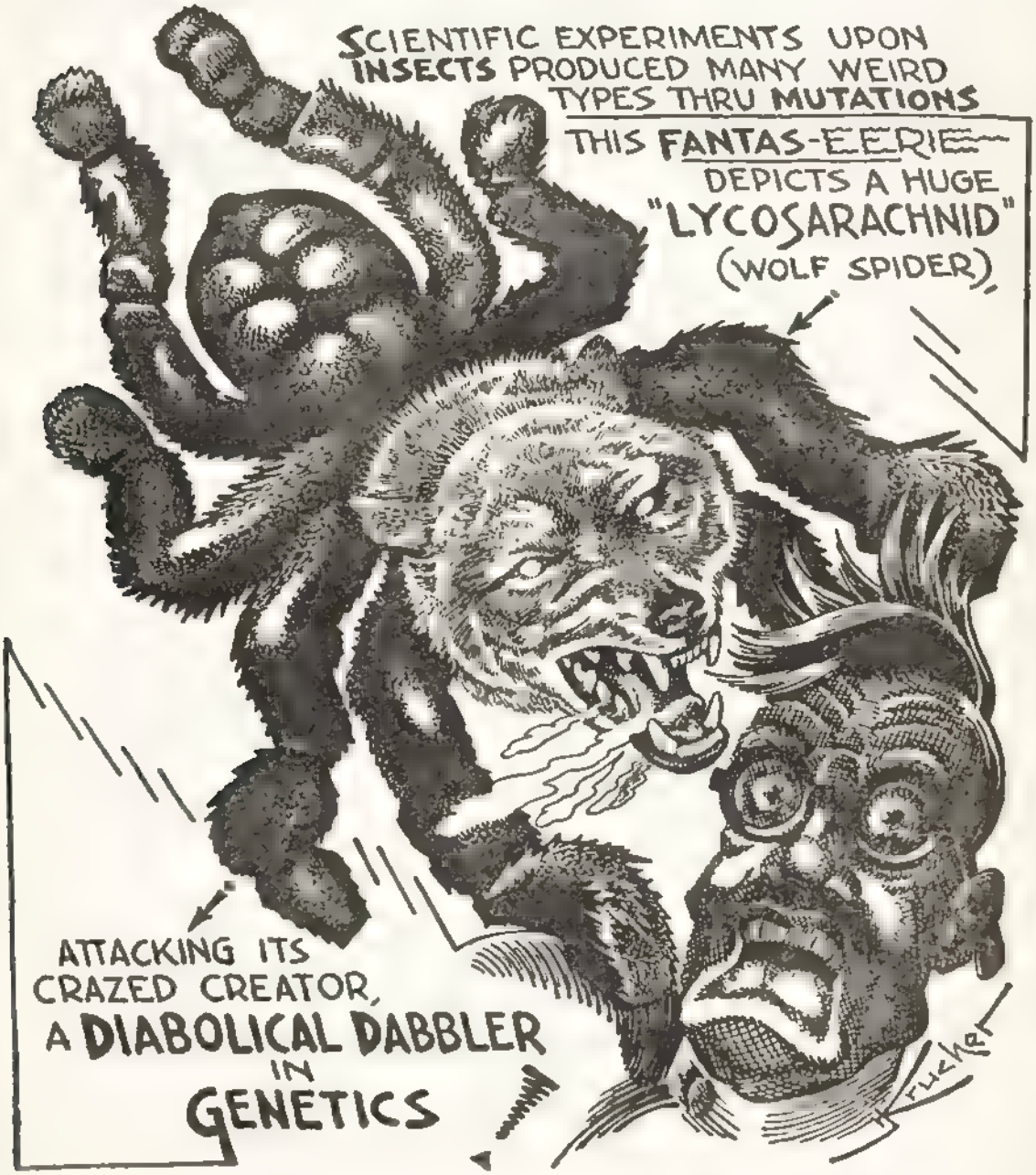
Miss Glover looked toward the window. "We'll be snowed in by tomorrow," she said resignedly.

When I looked outside that evening before retiring, I could see stars. I drank another stiff tumbler of brandy, shrugged, and went to bed. In spite of my experiences and Colonel Buff's story-in-explanation, I slept soundly.

But the next morning when I got up, I shivered in spite of the warmth of my cozy room.

The world outside was muffled and heaped with a half foot of snow, and the flakes, driven by a howling wind, were still rushing down.

A WEIRDUTATION



The Temple of Serpents

BY PAUL ERNST

HOME from Central Africa came Wells Beyerlein, the artist, with an imposing stack of canvases to his credit at a New York gallery. As usual, he went directly to Herbert Wayne's apartment. Wayne was his best friend, and it was in his comfortable bachelor suite that Wells put up during the infrequent periods he spent in New York.

"A wonderful trip, Wayne," said Wells as they sipped lazily at a tall drink apiece in front of Wayne's fireplace. "Not only from a productive viewpoint but also from a personal one. You've no idea how weird that country is down there."

"Down where?" asked Wayne. "Congo. It's wild and woolly, my son. The children play with skulls as our kids play with blocks. The fire is kept warm under the cooking-pot, and they eat little white men without salt or pepper!"

"How did you escape being eaten?" inquired Wayne with a smile.

"Oh, I managed," said Wells with a

Of course no one would actually believe in a wishing stone!

grimace. "My greatest source of worry was not myself but my paints."

"How come, Rembrandt?"

"It is the custom for the men to daub their faces and bodies with all the bright-colored pigments they can find. And you can imagine how my tubes of vari-colored, guaranteed paints attracted them! Especially the reds and yellows and greens. I finally had to spread a rumor that my paints were terribly bad medicine, and that any black boy who touched them to his body would curl up and turn into a snake! They believed me implicitly—it seems that their witch doctor had a bad habit of turning his enemies into snakes, so they knew it could be done."

For a moment the two men were silent, dreaming into the fire. There was a tremendous contrast between them. Wayne was slender and almost delicate, with the sensitive features and deep dark eyes of a dreamer; while Wells was essentially a man of action, with broad, stocky body and round, practical looking head.

Wayne broke the spell with a short laugh.

"The childishness of the human mind when it is left to itself!" he exclaimed. "Can you imagine an adult human being actually believing that another mortal is able to turn him into a serpent if he so desires?"

The artist gazed at his friend with somber eyes before replying.

"I can't laugh with you, Wayne. I've lost a lot of convictions since I began to travel around the darker corners of the earth. Some of our most precious laws of physics and common sense are knocked silly by the childish, savage mind that you deplore."

Wayne stared. "You don't mean to say that you believe in such things yourself?"

"I believe in nothing much. But at the same time I hesitate to disbelieve even the wildest statements."

"Did you ever see anyone being transformed into a snake?"

"No. Also I never saw a witch doctor change himself into a tiger or a lion—but it is supposed to have been done by the most powerful of them. I tell you, the things that some of those black-skinned, ferocious children of the jungle are capable of, would surprise you."

Wayne attempted to change the subject.

"What would you like to do tomorrow? You've been in the wilds for so long that we'll have to sophisticate you all over again."

"Now you're trying to humor me," laughed the artist. "But I'm not crazy, Wayne. And"—with a smile that was a mixture of earnestness and jest—"I've brought back proof of the snake story. I'll show you."

HE ROSE abruptly and went into the bedroom that was always his when he was in town. There he opened a huge suitcase, one of those carryalls that expand at either side like an accordion. It was a mute testimony to its owner's travels, this battered case. It was stained and discolored, with auxiliary straps sewed crudely on to reinforce it where it had weakened at various times, and it looked as though it could tell a long and interesting tale.

From the capacious folds of the big case, Wells brought out an object that seemed to be heavy and was about half as large as his clenched fist. As he took it up and handed it to his friend to look at, it glittered a dull green in the firelight.

Wayne gave an exclamation and nearly dropped it.

"What a gruesome thing! I thought it was alive at first."

He examined it carefully. It was a snake's head in stone, perfectly done. Blunt and flat and ominous looking, with hard, glittering scales and dull, beady eyes, it seemed more like an actual petrified head than a work of human hands. The dull green sheen was intrinsic in the stone—a stone that Wayne had never seen before.

"What a curious thing, Wells? And it's quite perfect. Surely no jungle savage carved this out of the rock!"

"Not supposed to be carved at all," said Wells, still with his inscrutable smile. "It is supposed to be a real snake's head turned into stone. The old witch doctor who gave it to me assured me that it was one of his enemies whom he had playfully turned into a snake and then petrified! He had a dozen in his filthy hut. His greatest treasures. Actually I think they came from an old temple, the remains of some unknown civilization

that was buried in the heart of the jungle. There were rumors of the existence of such a place, and I noticed several of the other blacks with fragments of ancient carvings and old metal statuettes."

"How on earth did you ever get this from the witch doctor?"

Wells grinned. "I painted a very snappy portrait of the old boy and got in his very best graces. I depicted him as a sort of giant, with his head above the tallest palms and the rest of the men playing about his toes like pigmies. Showed him what a wonderful man he was. It tickled him pink, and his parting gift was this snake-head. He seemed to be absolutely unimpressed by the wonder of its realistic detail—the main thing he harped on was a miraculous potency it is supposed to have."

Wayne raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"It is an aid to grant wishes," explained Wells lightly.

"Oho, a wishing-stone, eh?"

"Yes. One may hold this snakehead firmly in his left hand and make any wish he pleases. The wish will then proceed to come true with swiftness and despatch. Only—the number of wishes is limited to two."

"What have you wished for?"

"I haven't wished for anything. As you see, the head is green in color. The old villain assured me that it would stay green as long as its powers were unused. After it had been exhausted by being used for its two wishes, it will turn brown."

"I'll swear you half believe this tale, Wells. How is it that you haven't put it to the test and made your two wishes?"

The artist shrugged. "As you see, the head is a diabolical-looking thing. I've an idea that any wishes granted by it would end in grief."

Wayne sat up very straight in his chair with mock awe in his face. He held the snake-head soberly in his left hand, extending the thing well over his head.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "I will now proceed to make a wish. I assure you there is nothing up my sleeve, there is no trick of any kind to deceive you. You are about to witness a spectacle of black magic that will startle the world of science."

"Don't play the fool, Wayne!" said Wells. "Give me that thing."

HE SNATCHED at it but Wayne held it out of his reach.

"Nonsense, Wells. You're actually half afraid of this dead piece of stone. It's my solemn duty as your friend and mentor to drive the imp of credulity from your ivory skull. So here goes for the wish!" Again he held it up in his left hand with mock reverence.

"Mumbo jumbo, hocus pocus, and any other magical incantations that may be necessary. I am about to make a wish, and may the devils that hide in the dark places see to it that my wish comes true. Otherwise I might turn them into snakes!"

He held the snake-head higher.

"I wish," he said firmly, "I wish that I might see the craftsman who is really responsible for this bit of rock sculpture!"

An instant he sat there, rigid, half serious in spite of his levity. Then, slowly, he lowered his hand, the stone snake-head still firmly clutched in his fingers.

"Well, you see nothing drastic happened," he said, meeting Wells' intent stare with a cool grin. "Your marvelous snake-head is a fake."

"Do you feel all right?" the artist inquired anxiously, ignoring the sarcasm. "You look pale."

"Certainly I feel all right, but I'm a little chilly. Stir up that fire, will you?"

Wells' anxiety grew more marked at this. For if anything the room was too hot. "Wayne, you aren't well at all. I can see it in your face. You don't look normal."

Wayne started to reply, to laugh at his friend's fear. But he found himself unaccountably unable to speak. His tongue seemed paralyzed, and when he attempted to rise from his chair, his body was numb and lifeless.

The snake-head in his hand suddenly grew cold with a living coldness. Its clammy chill spread all over him, till he shook and trembled like a leaf on a dying tree. And then fear descended on his numbing brain. Again he tried to cry out, to call to his friend whose face was slowly fading from his sight.

A thousand pinwheels of fire burned in his eyes. Around and around they flared in ever greater circles until a vast sheet of solid flame closed him in. The flame was

extinguished, and with it his consciousness and life. . . .

SLOWLY he realized that he was among the strangest surroundings he had ever seen. He had a sense of being smothered in hot, dank gloom; he felt as though great, soggily warm blankets were over him, closing out all air and revivifying coolness.

Opening his eyes he found himself looking straight up at a ceiling of branches and leaves far over his head. This ceiling of greenery had an intensely tropical look; and running up to it and under it in every possible direction vines and more branches thrust aggressively, so thick as to choke the already stifled air. Dappled, excessive sunlight played on the topmost leaves, but down where he lay there was no sun. Bright as it was it did not penetrate through the almost solid wall of tropic growth that closed like green water over his head. Around him a continuous enclosure of underbrush shot crookedly up like tremendous, hopelessly tangled spider-webs. A dog could hardly have wormed a way through the twining mass.

Something seemed tugging at his hand; and looking curiously at his left arm he saw that it was stretched out, taut and rigid as though some force was trying to pull him to his feet. Observing the thing in his hand he gave a gasp of fear and tried to drop it but could not. It was a snake's head, cold with a living, repellent coldness.

Then he remembered—the scene in his apartment by the light of the fire—Wells Beyerlein handing him the snake-head.

"I suppose I'm dead!" he reflected, and he pitied himself, thinking of the interests he had given up in life for the sake of forbidden curiosity. "And I suppose this is the jungles—the African Congo!"

He felt again the insistent tugging at the hand that held the bit of stone. It was as though he held the end of a rope that was being slowly and inevitably wound up by a great drum, pulling him toward it. In helpless response he rose and started to walk in the direction from which the unknown power was tugging at him. And ever his outstretched arm with the snake-head in its clenched fist was as taut with strain as an iron bar.

He noticed that the wiry, tangled skein of undergrowth curled up into a leafy tunnel to let him pass. In and out among the tremendous tree trunks he wound a tortuous and unwilling path, always going toward the leaf-dimmed brightness of the jungle sunset. And ever the polished fragment of stone seemed to writhe and urge him on toward an unknown spot.

A sinuous black body, a crash of underbrush, the whirring of a slashing blade—and Wayne saw a jungle savage coming toward him. In one corded hand was held a knife that whipped from side to side, severing ropelike vines and branches, hewing out a path for the sweat-gleaming black body. As thoroughly at home as any four-legged beast was the two-legged one that hacked his way through the jungle. Great welts from long-healed scars, self-inflicted, beautified the ebony skin according to the savage mode. Splashes of yellow and red and white paint lent a ferocious bestial mask to the coarse black face with its thick lips and protruding lower jaw. The lobes of the big ears and the flare of the squat nostrils were stretched by incredibly large holes plugged with big wooden disks.

AN INSTANT the black man halted, staring straight at Wayne with mindless intensity. The stupid eyes opened wider till a ring of yellowish, blood injected white showed clear around the opaque pupils. Then with jerky swiftness the savage turned in his tracks and began slashing a path away into the inscrutable shelter of the sinister monsters of trees.

And now as Wayne felt himself pulled inexorably along a new sound came to his ears. It was a hoarse, guttural bellow, accomplished by loud hollow beats as though some heavy hand were banging down on a big drum. The sound came from the path directly in front of him.

A darker shadow outlined itself in the jungle murk and Wayne saw the beast that had been making the noise. Tremendous, manlike shoulders heavily padded with matted hair, huge hands beating crashingly down on a barrel of a chest, short legs crooked under ponderous body—a gorilla. As the animal roared its hate and defiance a yellowish slaver flecked its fanged jaws

and the little red eyes were terrible to see.

Wayne put forth all his strength to combat the infernal something that was dragging him directly toward the peril that screamed and roared and beat its great chest. He leaned his body back in a slant of forty-five degrees and dug his heels into the mold and rotted wood that carpeted the jungle; but, neither faster nor slower, the intangible force hauled him on—straight toward the monster!

He was so close to the gorilla that he could see every detail of dirt-matted black hair, every calloused wrinkle of fingerlike toes. He stared fascinated at the long, broken talons that would soon rip at his flesh, at the great arms that would soon be tearing him apart in the senseless rage that seemed to fill the creature to bursting. And always he tried to hang back against the force that was pulling him on.

Then an odd thing happened.

The blood-shot little eyes looked squarely at him. A screaming growl was checked midway between the snarling lips. The gorilla's rank hair rose like the fur on a startled cat's back. With a spasmodic twitching of pads of muscles the huge, manlike thing turned and swung off among the evil tree branches.

Before Wayne could speculate on the sudden terror of this jungle king, a new marvel forced itself on his attention.

DIRECTLY in front of him, apparently the goal toward which he was being forced was what seemed to be the front of a gigantic, ruined temple. Two tremendous columns shot up into the murk, guarding the front of a ponderous, mausoleumlike structure that looked to be at least four stories high and that extended back into the jungle for an indeterminate distance. Between the columns was the pitch darkness of a forty-foot-square entrance into the unlighted cube of stone.

He saw that the building was buried to half its height by the accumulated debris of ages, and that there was an incline leading down to the great door which had been uncovered in more recent days. Then he was too close to the entrance to do more than mark the front of the building itself.

He observed that the two key columns that flanked the entrance were squared at the base of half their height and then rounded to their gracefully flaring tops. The huge blocks of stone that formed the front of the temple were deeply carved with the straight-lined figures and mystic pictures that came originally from Egypt. The big columns, too, were banded with innumerable carven symbols and figures in every conceivable pose. Squatted at the foot of each of the two big columns was a great stone image of an eaglelike bird. Harsh and intolerant were the glaring eyes, and harsh and cruel were the hooked beaks that jutted out as though about to rend and tear. On the flat, ominous head of each bird was set a tall stone crown, like a miter indicating royalty.

The weight of the thick roof was suspended over the void of the mighty entrance on a monolithic beam of stone that was fully ten feet square. This was also covered elaborately with the straight-lined figures and the picture writing. And directly in the center, jutting out over the gloomy entrance of the door, was gigantic stone snake's head as big as a large man's body and with colored stones for eyes that glinted with dull menace.

So much he had time to notice. Then, with his unwilling arm still outstretched in front of him and taut with the power that hauled his body along, he found himself passing under the huge snake's head and into the towering entrance way.

Turns to right and left, winding passages in the pitch blackness—and the strain was suddenly relieved. His arm dropped to his side, but he found his fingers still clenched around the repellent, cold snake-head.

No slightest ray of light came to his eyes. The darkness was so thick that he could feel it pressing around him like swirling water. But gradually he was aware of a sound. It was like myriads of soft whispers, a rustling of ghostly silk, a pressure of dry scales on smooth rock flooring.

From every direction came the rustling whispers, the dragging of sinuous bodies. Something passed sluggishly over his foot, coiled lazily around his leg.

In panic he turned and ran through the darkness, his feet now and then touching writhing, squirming things. He banged

against a wall, felt along it, and stumbled over a stair. Up and up he crawled around a twisting way, feeling the slippery, age-worn stone of the ponderous steps under his feet, until the hand that still clutched the snake-head, came in contact with what seemed to be a trapdoor. It was not of stone but of wood, and it felt rough and freshhewn, the work of some breathing human being in the midst of terrifying and impersonal rock.

A moment he crouched there panting, hearing in imagination the whisper of scaly bodies dragging themselves over smooth flooring. Then he exerted all his strength and pushed at the trap-door over his head. It seemed to give a little. Another heave and it swung suddenly upward. He scrambled through and slammed it down over the stairway.

The great hall in which he now found himself was lighted from end to end by a faint, pervasive blue glow coming from some unknown source. In the blue light he saw that it was evidently an inner shrine room, some ancient holy of holies; around the walls were more of the elaborate carvings and picture writing.

At one end of the hall was an immense statue, an idol representing a monster, half human and half bird, that squatted on its haunches and glared out over the room. It was set a little way from the end wall so as to hint at an entrance behind it.

And now he saw something else! On the floor of the hall, twisted and curled like willow twigs in the heat of a fire, were scores and scores of snakes. But these snakes did not move. They lay there as motionless, as rigid as though frozen. Obviously they were lifeless.

He advanced cautiously to the nearest and touched it with his foot. There was no motion from the serpent and no give to it. He soon ascertained why—it was stone! The snakes in this chamber in some manner had been petrified.

A movement caught the corner of his eye, and turning to the idol at the end of the room he saw a large snake gliding with frenzied haste away from the awesome image. It was writhing over the floor at incredible speed. Straight toward Wayne it came, but before he could feel apprehension there was a change in all its movements. More and more slowly it crawled, a sort of languor appearing in every move—more and more sluggish till almost at Wayne's feet it assumed the rigidity of the others. He touched his foot to it and it was like feeling a stick of wood. He raised it, then dropped it—and it broke squarely in two! It also was stone!

And now there was a new diversion. Muffled sounds as of a struggle came from the entrance behind the idol. There was a hasty shuffle of bare feet. A black boy hurtled around the statue and came bounding over the floor. It was one of the painted, bestial-seeming jungle men such as Wayne had seen on his enforced journey to the temple.

Suddenly the muscled black boy was rooted to the floor, paralyzed. Wayne saw the arms and legs twitch with what was evidently a tremendous fight to overcome the spell that seemed to hold them in its grasp. The spasmodic jerkings stopped, and the man was motionless.

Then Wayne saw a transformation that was short and relentless and utterly appalling. The black boy seemed to grow slimmer and rounder. The arms merged into the trunk so that they disappeared altogether. The legs melted into one columnar mass which also dwindled rapidly in size. Soon the entire body was a slim black cylinder of flesh with a flat head on it that had lost all traces of humanity. Before the details of the unearthly metamorphosis could be described it was complete. For an instant the snake, that had ten seconds before been a human being, balanced its length in air. Then it toppled swiftly over and with its fall was shattered into pieces like brittle glass.

THE air seemed suddenly charged with evil as tangible as electric current. Wayne found his eyes dragged from the wonder that had occurred and riveted on the grim idol. Slow, dragging steps could be heard.

He was about to be granted his wish! He was about to see with his own eyes the sculptor of the snake-head that was clamped in his unwilling left hand!

For an instant the slow steps ceased.

Then, out from behind the satanic-looking stone idol stepped a figure that seemed to have been evolved from a nightmare.

The body, wrinkled with age, was bent and twisted and infirm. The shriveled black flesh was covered with stinking strips of untanned hide that flapped grotesquely with the creature's shuffling walk. The skinny arms were those of a weird skeleton, but it was the face of the Thing that was most unbearable. From brow to chin, from ear to ear, it was covered with coarse, yellowish gray hair! Like a mask it was, that unwholesome-looking thicket of fur that covered nose and chin and forehead; and from the caves of the eye-sockets, little red eyes peered forth.

The creature stood for an instant just in front of the great stone image, looking at Wayne with an intensity that robbed him of every shred of his will-power. Hypnotic as the glance was, he could not have moved if death itself had been the penalty. He felt turned to stone himself at the impact of that evilly intelligent, fiercely intent gaze.

Dragging his gnarled feet, the hairfaced black man advanced slowly toward Wayne. He seemed in no hurry about it, picking his way leisurely among the stiffened reptiles on the floor as though they were pollution he did not care to touch. And ever those red little eyes ate into Wayne's heart.

In them Wayne read a purpose that set him to trembling like a taut, vibrated cord. What he had seen happen to the unfortunate jungle black man was shortly to happen to himself! In a few seconds he too would crash to the floor, a human form no longer, breaking impotently into a dozen pieces!

The little eyes held his gaze with fascinated helplessness. They bored into his brain, feeling as tangible as red-hot needles. White and trembling, Wayne stared back. He saw the pupils of the creature's eyes so expanded that he seemed to be looking into two black holes, down into unguessable depths.

Wayne's head began to sway rhythmically back and forth on his slack shoulders. The little red eyes he was staring at increased in size until they became great flaming circles. The huge circles became multitudes of rings, concentric, of many vivid colors. The hall melted away and became roofed with stars, every star a flaring pinwheel of sputtering fire.

He felt his arms merging into his trunk as the bewitched black man's had done. He felt his legs fusing into one piece of quivering flesh. With a roaring inside his head like the noise of a thousand cataracts, he felt his skull changing its shape.

The glaring little eyes blinked as though the strain of their weird stare was too much even for superhuman strength. And with the sudden filming of the hypnotic eyes, though it lasted for but a fraction of a second, Wayne had an instant's reprieve.

HE FELT the bit of stone in his hand that had brought upon him the fate so soon to be his. There was something about it that he ought to remember. Something that might save him. What was there about the stone? Oh yes . . . It was a wishingstone. It would grant the power of two wishes before it turned from green to brown and became exhausted. Two wishes. The stone was still green. Only one wish had been used. . . .

And Wayne screamed aloud. He writhed and struggled to move his arms and legs. His left arm slowly raised over his head, though it was like tearing strong linen to get it loose from his body.

"I wish to get out of this awful place forever!"

For an eternity of suspense he waited. Nothing happened. The red eyes peering from behind the ghastly mask of hair held him once more in their hypnotic power. He turned and twisted to escape the spell that was surely stealing over him again. His arms! If he could only wrench them loose from his sides he might spring on the demon that was transforming him into a scaly, crawling thing!

He fought and lashed out with his arms.

"Steady, steady," said a voice.

Slowly the great, blue-lighted hall, the grinning stone idol that was half human, half bird, the hair-covered mask of a face with its glaring red eyes—all faded from his sight. But his arms were still helplessly bound to his sides. He flapped them feebly.

"Easy, Wayne. You're all right now." said the voice.

Opening his eyes he saw Wells Beyerlein bending anxiously over him and holding his thrashing arms There was another man with him, a spectacled, professional-looking man who was at the moment engaged in shutting a small black bag. Wayne felt the sting in his shoulder of a recent hypodermic injection.

Flooded by a vast, overwhelming content and a sense that somehow everything was all right, he closed his eyes and relaxed. He heard the door open and close, and felt that the spectacled man had gone out with his little black bag and left him alone with his friend.

"I've had such a ghastly nightmare, Wells," he whispered weakly.

"Yes, yes," soothed Wells. "And now let me have this infernal thing." Coaxing fingers opened the clenched left hand and removed the stone snake-head.

"Such an awful nightmare!" repeated Wayne drowsily.

"But you're all right now. Everything is all right now. It was only a mirage. Go to sleep and rest your nerves."

With a puzzled frown Wells tried to explain the phenomenon to Wayne, after his friend had rested and come to himself again.

"The snake-head was probably saturated, drenched with some one of the devil's brews that those witch doctors can make with their jungle herbs. Then it dried, leaving only a residue in the pores of the stone. And the heat of the fire, and the warmth of your hand as you clenched it served to release a vapor that drugged your nerves and produced the hallucination you went through."

"You're sure that's the explanation?" asked Wayne.

"No, I'm not sure. But it's the only things I can think of."

Wayne turned the stone snake-head over and over in his hand.

"Your theory doesn't explain the change of color," he remarked. "When you gave it to me it was green. Now it's brown!"

"No," admitted Wells uneasily, "my theory doesn't explain the change of color."

And together they stared with somber eyes at the enigmatic bit of stone that had once been a shimmering green and that was now dull, used-up brown.

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S. B. Q. No. 3
c/o G. P. O.
June 1st, 1941.

DEAR Rolfe:

I fear you must be thinking I have behaved rather scurvily in keeping you waiting so long for an answer to your last letter, especially as it brought me the exciting news of your promotion; but when you read what follows, I am sure you will understand and acquit. As I told you in my last, the "hush-hush" stuff I am on at present (its nature must not be hinted at even to a brass-hat of the M.O.I.) gives me precious little time for writing, even when things are normal. But things have been far from normal recently. We have had tremendous, unbelievable, floods out here, and for about a fortnight I was flood-fighting day and night. It was the most nerve-wracking and exhausting job I have ever tackled, or ever expect to tackle, and I have had neither time nor strength for anything else. It was when the floods were at their worst that I was brought into close contact with a most mysterious and tragic happening. It has had such a curious and unsettling effect on my mind that I feel I must share it with you to help me back somewhere near to normal. I shall tell you what happened as clearly and exactly as I can; but I shall not offer any explanation because I have none to offer.

I am writing this in the tiny garden of the shepherd's cottage that has been my quarters all the times I have been here. It is a riot of old-fashioned flowers and herbs—sweetwilliam, lad's love, honeysuckle, double daisies, and many others whose names I cannot remember, though Morag has told me them all. There is also, of course, a rowan tree, to guard the house from evil; but, alas, as a prophylactic against evil it has been a complete failure. If I look southwards, I look down a long glen with rocky hills rising literally into the clouds on both sides and with a swift strong stream, foaming over linns and boiling through deep pools, twisting through it like a shining serpent as far as one can see. I wish I had the ability to put it on paper for you as it is now. But, as you know, I have never been able to describe anything except engines, and they can be described in a few dull technical words. I'm afraid I've never taken much interest in natural beauties, unless they were of the feminine gender, and I have not always wanted them to be too natural. But this glen somehow takes you by the throat. Even in mist or rain it fascinates. Today it is a faeryland of gold and amethyst with a stream of quicksilver bickering and flashing through it, and lays a faery spell on one's mind. It is so enchantingly lovely and peaceful today that but for the pathetic silence in the cottage behind me I should be tempted to think that the memories of three weeks ago were the memories of a nightmare.

The cottage itself is more picturesque than comfortable, but when I came here eight months ago its dry-built walls and thatched roof certainly enclosed one of the happiest bits of space on the planet. Shemas (that's what it sounds like; they tell me it's Gaelic for James) MacGillivray, the shepherd, is a tall, supple, big-boned, granite-faced Highlander about forty. Johan, his wife, is a hard-haired, high-cheekboned woman a year or two younger, with a voice too soft to belong to anything human, and a face that always seems to be listening to something unseen. Morag was there then, too, "little Morag" everyone called her, though she was really rather tall for her age, a freckled delight about nine years old, with cornflower-blue eyes, a sudden radiant smile, and the beginnings of her mother's listening face.

Morag is not here now, and the little house is like a lantern without a light.

SHE was a favorite with all the people for miles round, the most vividly alive thing in the glen. Indeed, in some strange way she seemed to complete the glen, as rose completes a rosetree. Poetry has never meant anything to me, but she made me recall two lines of Wordsworth in some poem I read for School Cert, and have now forgotten:

A dancing shape, an image gay,
To haunt, to startle, and way-lay.

She knew the names of all the birds, and where their nests could be found. She could manage a sheep-dog nearly as well as her father, and she nursed new-born lambs with an exquisite but very practical tenderness. She had a little forlorn lamb of her own that she fed out of a bottle, talking to it all the time as if it were a little human. I had never seen a lamb at close quarters before, and I got a lot of fun out of watching that one at feeding time. When it was sucking its bottle it wagged its tail in an absolute ecstasy. At least, it wagged the top part of it at a great rate. But the whole tail was really too long for it to manage, so the top part went to and fro with the speed of a Hurricane's propeller and the bottom part wobbled ludicrously trying to keep up. I think it was that lamb that cost her life, but none of us know what happened or how it happened.

Shemas and his wife literally worshipped Morag, and I had not been long with them before I, too, was worshipping the same vivid little divinity. She got me first by showing me how to tickle a trout, "guddlin' " she called it. I came upon her suddenly one day lying face downwards over the edge of the Luath (that's the name of the stream) her right hand was in the water, and when she saw me she made a hurried signal with her left to approach softly. In a few moments she had lifted a spotted beauty ten or twelve inches long out of the stream with a true hunter's delight. I watched her catch several after that, and she did it always with the grace and economy of movement of a cat catching a mouse. We became great friends, and she used to accompany me up and down the glen whenever I could allow her. She seemed never to grow tired, and whatever her mood might be, her spirit was always alive. What a glorious woman was unfolding in that child, and how senseless it seems that the blind forces of nature be allowed to extinguish that exquisite flame!

The floods began to rise in the middle of April. It had rained steadily for over a month. And such rain! Not tropical. Not like a thunder shower. Pitiless, pelting, dour rain that just went on and on without stopping day or night. The hills were always obliterated by masses of tawny clouds, and the rain came crawling down the glen, inspissated at regular intervals, like a never-ending army of wraiths bent on some weird vengeance. We saw neither sun nor star for days and nights on end, and at last the relentless rhythm of the rain became maddening, like myriads of tiny feet trampling through one's very brain. But I do not think that even rain like that could have been entirely responsible for the terrific floods that followed. I think some snow lying hidden in folds of the hills farther north must have melted and come down.

BY THE first of May the Luath had swollen into a great river that came roaring down the glen brown as umber. Even where it flowed most smoothly long white weals showed under its brown skin, like livid streaks of anger in a human face. A few days later MacGillivray came in with the news that some of his lambs had been carried away. At that news a spasm of intense pain passed over Morag's face. "O, the poor thingss," she said in her soft accent, and ran out into the rain to look for her own lamb. It was evidently safe, for she returned in a few minutes.

"I mind some yearss ago," said MacGillivray to me, "the floods came out all over the glen. Many sheep and cattle wass lost. A man too (his voice grew impressively solemn) wass lost. Pray God, we haf not another like that."

The floods continued to rise and I received orders to collect every possible man and give all the assistance I could to the people of the threatened area. For days and nights we worked like slaves. We moved people and animals to safety. We transported corn and hay ricks above any possible flood level. We salvaged furniture and farm implements. But the utmost we could do was as nothing against what cried out to be done, and the floods got the honor of the battle in the end. The Luath rose so rapidly that the whole glen became a raging torrent in which trees, sheaves of corn, milk churns, carts, household utensils and the bodies of dead animals went rolling and swirling down in a ghastly turmoil. Happily MacGillivray's cottage stands high on the hillside,

so I was able to return for an occasional meal and a little sleep.

Tired almost beyond bearing, I went squelching back to the cottage one night, just as darkness was falling. I was surprised, and, unreasonably, a little annoyed, at having to open the door for myself, for Morag usually had it open long before I reached. Inside, I found the lamps unlit, and when my eyes had got used to the darkness, I saw Johan MacGillivray slumped in a low chair by the fire, her clothes steaming, her hair tousled, her whole body an image of misery. She was weeping softly with a kind of exhausted moaning sound which was terrible to hear. I spoke to her, but she did not even look up. I stood helplessly looking at her, wondering what was the matter, and after a time her natural courtesy broke through her grief. She spoke in a broken voice scarcely audible:

"Little Morag iss gone," she said. "We haf not seen her since breakfast. She went out to look after her lamb, and she did not return. Shemas is looking for her now. I looked myself until I wass unable to walk any more. But . . . she iss not to be found."

THEN in her grief she forgot I was there, and broke into a kind of croon; the most pathetic thing I have ever heard.

"O my Dawtie," she keened, "My poor little Morag. She iss gone, she iss gone. No more. No more. She iss in the watter, the dark, dark, cold, cold watter."

I have never heard anything like it before. I hope never to hear anything like it again. I spoke stupid words of comfort to her. I told her I would find Morag; but the words did not come from my mind. Then I stumbled out into the darkness. My first thought was to find someone to be with her while her husband was away, and I went to get a Mrs. Munro who lives in a cottage about half a mile away. Her husband is with the forces and she has no children, so, when I explained the position to her, she came with me at once. Torches were flashing far down in the glen when we got back together to the MacGillivray's cottage, so, leaving Mrs. Munro to go in alone, I made towards the moving torches as quickly as I could.

All the able-bodied men of the district as well as a number of our fellows were moving along the edges of the torrent in the darkness looking for the lost child. It was a dangerous job, for a single false step might mean death any moment. Every man there risked his life a hundred times before morning broke. But they were used to danger, and they did not think of themselves. We searched all through the night and the day that followed it in the pitiless rain, but without success. The flood kept its secret. Women brought us food from time to time, but though we had fasted so long we had little appetite.

When darkness again fell, MacGillivray and I, by common, despairing consent, turned towards the cottage. We walked in dumb silence. We were too tired and heartbroken to speak. MacGillivray's face was like carved rock. He had aged many years in a few hours. We found Mrs. Munro still with Johan. Johan was no longer weeping. She was sitting in her usual low chair beside the fire, the chair in which she had nursed Morag as a baby, and her face was set in a stony look of resignation. In her arms, held as if it were the baby Morag still there, was a large plaid of some bright red tartan, rolled up into a long roll. I happened to see MacGillivray's face when he saw the plaid in his wife's arms, and I saw a strange, haunted expression break its iron despair for a moment. It was a tremor of something akin to fear. It passed swiftly. He moved forward as if to comfort his wife, but before he could get to her Johan spoke. Her voice did not seem to belong to her. It reminded me of the voice of that medium we heard at the Harrison's.

"I have got out the plaid," she said; "my great-grandmother'ss plaid. It gathered her husband from the floods yearss ago. It will gather my little Morag this night. Take it Shemas. Lay it on the floodss. Perhaps Mr. Sedgwick will be so good as to go with you. In the morning we shall find her in it."

I can't describe to you, Rolfe, the tragic unearthliness of that moment. I felt suddenly weak, as if something unseen were drinking my very blood. I didn't try to say anything. I just waited for McGillivray to act. I never dreamt he would agree to his wife's eerie proposal, which, though it had stirred the uncanny in me, seemed at the same time the expression of a deranged mind. I ex-

pected him to reason with her, to explain to her the futility of the thing she suggested. But MacGillivray said nothing. He stood for a moment with bent head. Then he took the plaid from her and turned towards the door.

I followed him out into the night. The rain had stopped and a raging wind was tearing the clouds away from stars that gleamed menacingly like drawn daggers. We picked our way down to the edge of the rushing water. We stood for a moment in the tearing wind. Then MacGillivray opened out the plaid and thrust one end of it into my hands. Together we flung it out over the dark, swirling water. The wind caught it. For a moment it thickened the shadows between us and the stars. Then it was gone. We returned in silence to the little silent house. We were all exhausted, but we could not sleep. We sat together in the yellow lamplight until the morning.

THE moment it was light enough to see, we went out together, for the women insisted on coming. About a mile below the cottage there is a broad ledge of rock. In normal times it is far above the water, but during the floods it was just awash. As we worked our way down the edge of the torrent in the increasing light, Johan gave a sudden cry and flung out a pointing finger. We all looked, and we all saw the brightness of the tartan on the brown rock.

Instinctively, we all started to run towards it. An irrational fear that had no shape rose in me as I ran. As the floods had risen in the valley and swept away the work of men's hands, so that fear rose in me, sweeping away all my neatly arranged scientific understanding of things and leaving me just like a primitive savage in the presence of the unaccountable. I did not know what we should find on the rock. Yet, somehow, I took it for granted that we were approaching something weird, something beyond the reach of explanation.

As we got nearer to the rock I could see that the plaid was wrapped round something, almost as if human hands had arranged it. First on the rock, I waited instinctively with bowed head for the others to come up. We stood together for a moment in silence. The MacGillivray himself bent down and tenderly unfolded the plaid. There, within its tartan folds, the limbs flexed, as if she were sleeping in her bed at home, a soft smile on her marble-white face, as if she were dreaming some happy dream, was the body of little Morag. We carried her home, and a week later she was laid to rest in the little churchyard far up the glen. There was a hazel tree over her grave.

For over a week I was confined to bed as a result of strain and exposure. I am almost all right again now but have not yet returned to duty. I cannot understand the occurrence I have just related. I have discovered since that a belief has been widely held in this part of the country from time immemorial that if any one is drowned a plaid thrown on the water at night will recover the body by the morning. How such ideas take root in the human mind is very difficult to explain. I do not believe there is any real explanation. Where little Morag's body was until it was caught in the plaid. Why the flood had not carried it far farther down the valley. These things I don't know. But I do know that when that red plaid was unwrapped in the morning, her dead body was in it.

Now I must stop. I shall have some leave soon and shall spend some part of it in London; so we shall be able to see each other. Till then, all the best.

Yours as always,

RAY.

Live Evil

BY EMIL PETAJA

SHUDDERING in the cold November rain, Jan Gormley rang the bell again. Again nothing but vibrating echoes inside. He mopped an anxious face and twisted the *Sunset Weekly* in his hands. Gormley, a thin sparrow of a man, looked just a little ludicrous in an overlarge black raincoat. But there was a fierce fire inside his brain. Gormley was mad, madder than he had ever been in his life before.

Finally. Finally the door opened.

A big man with a cigar in his face filled the opening. He looked down at his visitor and his thick lips curled. Then he shrugged and stepped aside. Gormley darted in gratefully. He followed the fat man down a dim hall and into a grimy but somehow important-scented office.

Lettering on an outside window proclaimed:

ALBERT FAST ENTERPRISES

Albert Fast grunted as he slid behind his big desk. He pretended to be busy for a moment. Gormley just sat, yearning to vent his mad, waiting for his cue.

"Well, Gormley," Fast provided it and a stock answer as well, "what is it? More money? The answer is no. Not a cent."

Gormley flushed. He knew Fast's games. Fast had tried to make people cringe ever since he was a slum kid in the San Francisco junk business. Often he had. Now as a respected enterpriser with greedy fingers in many pies he indulged himself almost daily. This little East Bay suburb partially belonged to him. Symbolically, his half was built on a swamp. His real estate brochures referred to it as Aloha Lagoon.

Gormley plunged.

"Albert, why did you let them print this story? You know what my research means to me! I'm devoting my life to it. You advanced me money to keep going. We were in school together. I thought you understood, Albert. Why did you tell them things —allow them to misinterpret?"

Fast's smile was more gloating than reproachful as it purported to be.

"You're too serious about things, Gormley," he said. "Always were that way. As a scientist you hadn't ought to let a hick-weekly story bother you. A scientist has to be hard-headed, just like a business man. Practical. Never get rattled. That's the key to success."

Gormley's narrow face paled.

"Scientists have to be dreamers, too. Until their ideas are proven. That's what I'm trying to do, to prove my research is not only sound and practical but vital to the whole human race!"

The fat man puffed his cigar as in deep thought.

"Maybe. Let's have a look at what young Bill Higgins wrote. I haven't seen it yet."

He scanned the news story. His chins wobbled with amusement.

"Here we are. 'It would seem Sunset has

If one believes in jinxes, why not in zones of evil?

a genius in its midst. Dr. Jan Gormley, late of Atlantic University, has invented a deghosting machine. Are you troubled with goblins or poltergeists? If so, send for Gormley. He'll rout them out in jig-time. We neglected to find out his rates, but all interested should etc., etc.'" Albert Fast grinned.

"This article will make me a laughing stock. There is no mention of my extra-sensory-perception experiments in the East, theories which have since been proven to be sound. I told you I wanted no publicity of any kind. How could you do it, Albert?"

Fast mangled his cigar. A self-made man, he harbored a concealed respect for education and the science degrees Gormley was entitled to use after his name. But this respect frequently backfired.

"I owed Bill's father a favor," he justified himself, "so when Bill came around spouting about his new job, wanting a story, I mentioned you. It was off-hand, but he got interested, then I got carried away. How'd I know it would jell like this?" He made like Pontius Pilate.

"My creditors are on me like wolves," Gormley said. "I'll probably get thrown out in the street. Worst of all—my machine! My beautiful machine! I've worked ten years on it; got most of my parts from Dudley Smith at KLB Radio Station." He winced. "I had to prevaricate a little. I think Mr. Smith believes it to be something new for television. Otherwise he'd never have advanced me the electronic parts I needed."

FAST grinned. "I know Smith. Him and his two-bit radio station. Always trying to make a fast buck with some phoney advertising scheme. His angle is, the phonier it is, the more the public will eat it up. Yeah, he'll be onto you like a ton of bricks when he reads this." He chuckled. "He fell for your degrees, just like me. Now, instead of a super-television set he expected to be in on, he's stuck with a deghosting machine." He gnawed his cigar gleefully, then scowled. "What am I laughing at? I'm in the same boat with Smith. You're into me for eight hundred." His eyes narrowed on the little man, as if speculating on how much his carcass was worth at present meat prices.

Gormley stood up.

"Won't you just help me once more—?"

"Not a cent."

Gormley swallowed. "I know it has taken me a long time. These things do. It's been trial and error, with no precedent to go on. I've made mistakes. But I'm on the right track now, Albert! I've discovered just where my error was. It wasn't in the machine at all. It was—"

"Save your breath, Gormley. I got taken. Forget it."

"But—my machine! They'll take it away from me an—"

"Scrap it for parts. That's what they'll do. Likely Smith will give me the job. I'll make a little on it, anyway. We'll tear it to pieces and put them where they'll do some real good."

Gormley's knuckles whitened on the arms of his chair. He leaned forward urgently. "Good! What could do more good than my machine! To save the world from the horrors that leak into it from evil dimensions—every night, every hour. Albert, those leakages of evil must be stopped up before it is too late. Evil influences are taking possession of men. It's getting worse all the time. Don't you see? If nothing is done these dimensional faults will widen and widen until—can't you see the world is doomed without my machine?"

"Gormley," the fat man's voice was cold and contemptuous, "maybe I didn't have your education. Maybe I did drag myself up from the gutter. But I know what gives. I know the world is in a tight spot. But we'll get out of it without any crackpot deghosting machine." He rose ponderously. "Now, if you don't mind. Time's money to me. I've wasted too much of both on you."

GORMLEY, beaten, was closing the office door behind him when Fast called him back. It seemed an impulse. He sank back wondering in his chair while the fat man tramped the floor. Once he tried to plead his case further but Fast shushed him. Finally Fast parked his elephantine bulk right in front of him on the desk. His eyes burned with lethal acid, and a desperate kind of greed.

"You think it's that important, eh, Gormley?"

The little man nodded hopefully. "May I explain?"

Fast glanced at his watch. "Make it snappy."

"I will. Here is my basic theory. I believe that 'good' is a tangible living force. It exists strongly in certain places, leaking in from higher dimensions. All who come within its influences are affected to some extent. But there's one thing I overlooked. It seems—"

"Don't ramble," Fast warned.

"No-o. If one is religious my theory is fairly obvious. Take Lourdes, and other 'miraculous' places. Zones of good. Leakage of force for good from dimensions of light. The religious application comes when one asks, are these leakages purposeful or just random.

"At the opposite pole is evil. I believe there are also leakages of evil from dark dimensions. Certain old houses, rocky caverns, or lonely wastes on the surface of the ocean. Things happen in these places. Evil things which cannot be accounted for entirely. Often nothing can be seen, or heard, or detected by other senses. Suicide. Murder. I believe that each so-called haunted house contains a fault, a leakage where malignant tangible entities of pure evil slip through and when they find a suitable outlet for their desires cause misery and death."

The look of introspective boredom on Albert Fast's face changed suddenly. His ears perked.

"Haunted houses, eh? You know, I had a hunch when I called you back, Gormley. You know me. I don't just let eight hundred bucks fly out of the window without putting up a scrap. My hunch told me there might be something in all this malarky after all."

Gormley glowed. "We might save the world—"

"Forget it," Fast snapped.

"It's only theory," Gormley admitted. "But if one just could trace back and locate the exact origin of the evil in certain men. Hitler, for example, or—"

"Forget it! What hit me was what you said about haunted houses. You mean, like houses where everything goes wrong. Families bump each other off and then when somebody else moves in they lose all their money or go nuts. Finally the house gets a jinx on it and nobody'll touch it with a ten-foot pole."

Now Gormley understood. He pushed his advantage.

"Exactly like that, Albert. Think of the practical side. If we could stop up these leakages of evil. Make these houses habitable."

"I'm way ahead of you." The fat man paced again, then whirled. "Mind you, I don't want anybody to get wind of this. Can't afford to have my name connected with any fiddle-faddle. I'm a practical man, Gormley. What I want first is proof. Proof positive, like the ads say."

"Certainly," Gormley assured him. "And I'm now in the position to offer you proof, providing we have access to one of these authentic zones of evil."

Fast flicked his cigar and stared out at the pouring rain. "Do you know the old Castongua Mansion in the ravine?"

Gormley nodded. The lumbering old frame structure had once belonged to a *nouveau riche* French-Canadian. His name still adhered to it in spite of Fast's glib real estate maneuvering. It had, in fact, been suspect in Gormley's lists for a long time. Sinister things had happened in that dark house in the ravine.

FAST owned Castongua Mansion, evidently. It was obvious he had been unable to dispose of this valuable property. And herein lay the fat man's mounting enthusiasm. The core of his interest lay, as always, in self-gain, not in any desire to help humanity.

"Make that house saleable and I'll talk turkey!" he cried.

"I understand the paneling was imported from France," Gormley murmured. "And the parquet floors are solid mahogany."

Fast wiped a wet tongue over his wide lips. "I've owned that house for the best part of twenty years. Sold it once. Writer from Denver. Committed suicide. Bought it back from the estate, they owed me money. Tried to strip it. But damn it, every time I sent workmen there something went wrong. One fell out of a third floor window and broke his neck. Another went home and choked his wife with a curtain sash he'd

taken from one of the windows. I kept them at it until another of my men was caught peddling heroin that he kept stached up there. He got sent up.

"Finally I gave up. My workers wouldn't go in the place. And damned if the only load of paneling we got out of it didn't catch fire at the warehouse before I could sell it. I lost money all along the line, and I'm sick of it. The house is jinxed. Finally had to admit it."

"You believe in jinxes," Gormley said softly.

"Sure."

"But not in zones of evil."

"I believe in what I see," Fast blustered. "Show me what you got and I'll buy it. Maybe there are other houses—houses I could buy for a song. Yeah. We might do business after all. But I want an exclusive, mind you!"

Gormley nodded ironically. By an effort he kept repugnance from his face when the fat man massaged his shoulder, beaming in the midst of his expanding dreams.

"When would you like to start?"

"Tonight!" Fast exclaimed. "You get your gadget moved down there this afternoon. No, this evening. I'll send one of my truckers to help you. I'll meet you there—say, eleven or eleven-thirty. Okay?"

"Evil is strongest in the dark hours."

"Huh? Okay, see you there at eleven or so. Have everything all set. Can't waste time, eh? Busy day tomorrow. You get everything ready there and wait for me."

It was a dismissal. At the door Gormley turned. "What about Dudley Smith?"

"Smith. Yeah. If he bothers you, send him around to me. I'll head him off. The big thing is to get that mansion cleaned up. Means a lot to both of us, eh, Gormley? I'll play along. But remember, I'm a practical guy. Never bought a pig in a poke yet. None of this sight unseen hokey-pokey for me. I got to have proof. Proof!"

THE rain soon had him wet through, but Gormley could be philosophical now. Albert Fast was not an ideal partner for such an important undertaking, but better than none at all. At least his beloved machine was safe.

He climbed the three creaky flights to his loft in the miasmic clam flats district and, having reassured himself that the machine was safe, he broke up an orange crate and built a fire. This served to dry him off and to heat up a can of soup.

While he waited for the soup to heat he thumbed through his mass of notes regarding so-called haunted localities. He found a lengthy page on Castongua Mansion. Skimming up a ladle of soup from time to time, he went over it.

"Built in 1881 by Victor Castongua for his pretty young wife and her two daughters. He married late in life and left Canada when he received an unexpected inheritance. The inheritance preceded his marriage, significantly. Tempered his own reclusive bent with his wife's inclination for society. The mansion was built in the ravine some distance from the coach road to Martinez, but was still near enough to San Francisco to please his wife.

"A great oak tree shadows the east wing. Said to have been a hang-tree in road agent days. At least one hanging verified. A reckless boy of sixteen was suspected of stealing gold. An oldster interviewed about it in 1911, who attended the lynching, believed the boy to be innocent. Vicious mob. Haunting spectacle of brute violence. . . ."

Thus the very ground on which the mansion was built was steeped in terror and tragedy. The evilness pre-dated its erection.

The soup began to simmer so Gormley gave his attention to it, musing in a cursory way on Victor Castongua's troubles. One might expect him to have troubles, marrying a wife half his age. And yet what happened to the Castongua family was unnaturally villainous. Double murder, suicide. Insanity. The papers of the day made much of the sordid love aspects of the affair, so Gormley had no difficulty in tracing his material.

The malefic influences which haunted the mansion persisted after the last of the Castonguas had left it. A mild little Englishman named Carter, a writer of semi-religious matter, took it over. Within a year he unexpectedly began writing vicious slanderous articles about persons well known in the Bay Area. He was challenged to a duel and shot.

The house was empty for a decade, then

Albert Fast took it over. His difficulties brought forth a flare-up of the ghost legends that surrounded it, and now it lurked in that dark ravine with only an errant seagull and that old hang-tree to keep it company.

He was startled from his musings by the sharp rattle of bony fingers on the door. He put down the soup-pan with a sigh, and lagged to the door.

"Oh, Mr. Smith."

"How are you, my dear Gormley?" The radio station owner was tall and pale, with mild gray eyes, and always a smile on his thin lips. He sidled in, those gray eyes wandering casually about the room while his aquiline nose quivered in distaste at the stale atmosphere.

"I don't like to have to say this, Gormley, but—ah! There it is! There's my machine!"

"Your machine?"

Dudley Smith went over to it. "Of course. This and this and this—" He pointed a long finger at various parts of the heavy oblong object, which Gormley had encased for portability in a metal foot locker. "All these parts came from my electronic supplies. Even the case is mine. I remember now. I thought it was for tools or something. The whole thing is mine, Dr. Gormley. I'll take it with me, if you don't mind."

He snapped the lid shut and started away with it.

"You can't!" Gormley cried. "You're to go and see Albert Fast. He is my—partner."

Smith looked hurt. "I thought I was your partner."

"Yes-s. But you don't seem to understand, either of you. I don't care anything about the money. I'm a scientist. I want to help humanity. If there is money to be had out of my machine, keep it. You and Albert may have it all. I only want to continue my research. To—"

"To help humanity," Smith said drily. "You said that before. Very noble, I'm sure. But what about my parts? The papers are calling you a crackpot. I can't afford to wait forever. I thought you were engaged in something reasonable, not a ghost-trap."

"Just let me explain—"

"Sorry. I've no time, Gormley. I knew that Fast was helping you and I was impressed by that, too. Now it looks like you were playing us against each other. I ask you, is that nice for a man with your educational background?"

"I didn't mean to do that." Gormley was appalled.

"Perhaps not. But now that Fast has dropped you—"

"But he hasn't! Ask him!"

Smith turned. "Eh?"

"No. Albert is meeting me tonight at the old Castongua Mansion. We intend to culminate all my research there, at midnight. What is more, he believes there is money in my machine. If he can make the mansion habitable—"

"So that's it." Smith smiled wolfishly and sat down on the locker. "So Albert Fast actually thinks—wait a minute. So it is a phoney. So what. A litle judicious advertising. Some scientific claptrap, with your name to back it up. Yes. Maybe there is money in it. The world is full of gullible idiots. We could use the old 'are you sure *you* are safe' routine. Why, there might be millions in it. And I'm your partner!"

Gormley gasped. Not only was he hopelessly involved with an avaricious real estate man but now—fakery! Under Dudley Smith's patronage, with his penchant for phoney advertising, his machine was to be used to mulct people who had no need for it. Fake hauntings fake cures. And his standing in the world of science was to be the lure. . . .

"At least wait," he begged. "Don't take it now."

"All right." Dudley Smith unstraddled the case and looked down at the little man with a possessive smirk. "Have your experiment at the Castongua house. Only I'll be there, too. I've a share in this. If Albert Fast sells the house, I get my cut. We'll work it out. I'll draw up a contract. Everything nice and legal. Then I'll take my machine to see there's no hanky-panky. See you at midnight."

And the door snapped shut behind him.

PROMPTLY at nine a Fast Enterprises pick-up truck braked in front of Gormley's. He had been peering anxiously down for it for some time, with the rain drizzling off the eaves and down his neck. He didn't

wait. He hoisted up the heavy machine in both hands and groped awkwardly down the many ill-lit flights.

Grumbling about special favors for the boss and why hadn't Joe taken this run, the burly driver grabbed the foot locker out of Gormley's hand and swung it up in back. The pick-up careened over the soaked streets out of Sunset and presently into the mouth of the lonely ravine. The sky was deadly black, like the black Bay unseen to the left of the narrow byroad. Only the vaguest silhouette of bulky monstrosity was visible beyond the iron gates. The great oak tree loomed like a cloak of evil above it. Gormley's memory supplied the details—turreted gables, and all the intricate gingerbread which was so lavishly expended on the prodigious wooden horrors of the period.

The driver unlocked the gate. Then, hurrying with the box up to the veranda, he yelled over his shoulder, "Where do you want it?"

Gormley panted up behind him.

"Second room off the hall. Just under the oak. It was once the master library, I believe."

"You go ahead with the light," the driver told him, kicking the door open.

Gormley smiled sympathetically in the darkness. Yes, this great galoot of a man was afraid. Of what he didn't know. But he was familiar with at least some of the evil that this house had spawned. And besides that, he had the simple man's instinctive primal fear of what cannot be seen or heard, only vaguely felt.

And his fear was right. It could save him. Fear is the symptom of evil. . . .

They stepped warily across the great hall. The ring of light danced.

"Whew! What a stink!" The driver talked loudly. "I've smelled lots of old houses. Damp rot. Termites. But this! What d'you think it is, Professor?"

"Perhaps it is the odor of evil itself."

"Hey, I just thought of something. What are you gonna use for light in this weird old joint? No lights, you know."

"My machine will provide me with light," Gormley murmured. "Light is an excellent dispenser of surface evil in itself."

"Yeah? Well, here we are. Put your light to working, Professor. I'm scramming."

Then the dwindling footsteps and the driver's dark-whistling was gone and Gormley was alone. But not quite alone. . . .

The light pouring from his machine dazzled the eyes to look at it. Actually, it was many lights in one. Light rays and other rays, visible and invisible. These other rays did more than repel surface evil. They were calculated to destroy evil or at least to send it howling back to the dark dimensions that gave it life.

He looked around him at the musty paneling, the empty bookcases. In one corner the paneling was torn. That was where Albert Fast's strippers had admitted defeat. In this room.

THIS room had to its evil credit three murders, two suicides. In a cache behind these bookcases malignant drugs had been hidden. A sash from those rotting drapes had been used to strangle a woman. Just above this room, in the odd rambling way the house had to be built if the tree was to be saved, was the great gibbet-branch itself.

Gormley busied his mind with a theory about oak trees. He made notes on it. Oaks were sacred to the ancient Druids. Or were they? Was it not rather their parasitic companion, mistletoe? He remembered the first scene in the opera *Norma*, where the high-priestess of the Druids is seen gathering mistletoe for an important ritual. Mistletoe, symbol of love and happy times. Why? Because it kept evil at bay—evil which the oaks attracted? On this oak tree no mistletoe would grow. . . .

Anyway, it was not this house itself that attracted evil. The evil that had happened in it had strengthened itself, fed on it. But the evil was there before. It was not houses themselves, but something elemental in nature. Oak trees, perhaps. Or perhaps just *places*, invisible faults in the dimensional shield where evilness could come through. They could be on land, or in the middle of the ocean, or high in the air.

Partially the evil things that happened here were man's responsibility. But only partially. The dark creeping evil from the dark dimensions had saturated and fed it. For evil loves evil. Evil begets evil. . . .

An impatient clatter at the front door told him Albert Fast had arrived. The

door had been left unlocked so Gormley waited for the big man to burst in. It was patent to Fast's character to announce his arrival by noise. He blinked in the library doorway.

"Trying to blind a man?" he grumbled.

He looked for a chair and, as there was none, pulled up a packing box and lowered his overdressed carcass on it with an expression of annoyance at its hardness.

"Everything set?" he demanded.

"Everything."

"Good. Let's get going. This joint is like a wet tomb." He shivered, his narrow eyes flicking around him with distaste and active fear.

Gormley told him about Dudley Smith.

The big man exploded into profanity.

"Who does he think he is? Muscling in on my preserve!"

"He is in, Albert, just a little. After all, he did give me the parts. You kept me going. But never mind. I don't want much of anything. It's between you two."

Fast's rage mounted. "I'll wait just five minutes. After we get through the machine goes home with me. I'll put that two-bit faker in his place!"

To keep peace Gormley began to tell him about the machine.

"Lights," Fast grunted. "If that's all there is to it, I'll install five-hundred-watt lights all over this house. What's more, I'm beginning to think there's nothing to this ghost stuff. Why doesn't something show itself?"

"The reason we feel no manifestation of evil is proof that my machine does work. If I were to switch it off here—"

Fast blinked down at the lights, twitching his flabby shoulders in mounting impatience. "Maybe. Or maybe you just don't want to turn the lights off because then I would know it was a fake. Like I told you before, I'm from Missouri. You got to prove to me there is something wrong with this house. Otherwise I don't need you and your machine." His eyes narrowed on the little scientist. "All right, go ahead. Prove it!"

Gormley stood over the machine protectively.

"I'm going to have to confess something, Albert."

"So it is a phoney."

"No, no! I've tried it before. Many times. But every time I was alone. I didn't like to think of anyone else coming to harm. When I was alone in the presence of an evil force I felt its power, and yet there was no overt demonstration because—"

Smith's yell from the front hall interrupted.

DUDLEY SMITH blinked owlishly as he stepped within the argent rays of the machine. Fast glared at him. He greeted the big man with a nod and a supercilious smile. Gormley didn't matter. It was between them.

Suddenly Fast laughed loudly.

"You wouldn't want it anyway, Smith. It's a fake."

"Really?" The tall man brushed some dust from his sleeve elegantly. "I don't think that matters particularly, not to me. I've been making some telephone calls since I left you, Dr. Gormley. I think we're in business."

"But if the machine is a *fake*—"

Fast stopped suddenly. He looked at Gormley suspiciously. Maybe he had been a little hasty. He scowled at them both.

Dudley Smith put a cigarette in a jeweled holder and paced the room while he smoked, casting possessive glances at the machine.

"Just a minute!" Fast blustered. "Gormley, you're into me for eight hundred bucks. I started you out before you even saw Dudley Smith. I fed you, kept you going while you were building it. Anybody else has claims on your work, I'll buy them off!"

"Dr. Gormley," Smith put in smoothly, "I am prepared to set you up for life in any kind of a laboratory you wish. All I ask in return is your signature on certain publicity documents from time to time."

Gormley only stared. Fast reared up like an angered bull.

"I'll go one better," he bellowed. "Look here!" He pulled out his wallet and removed a check from it. "Here is my certified check made out to you. Five thousand dollars. This is yours, Gormley. To set you up, keep you quiet, and to deghost this house."

Dudley Smith laughed. Fast didn't like it. He got up heavily and grabbed the tall man

by the arm. Smith stopped laughing. His hand snaked toward an inner pocket.

"Don't!" Gormley cried. "Don't you see what you're doing—both of you?"

They looked across the machine at him. Their looks said, keep out of this. Fast held out the check. "Take it." It was a command.

"All you got to do is prove to me that this evil of yours exists here in this house, and that your machine can destroy it. How long will it take for your machine to clean it up?"

"I—I don't know," Gormley said. "The evil is strong. It has had much to feed on—"

"You're hedging again," Fast warned. "I got to have proof there's anything to all this. Shut it off!"

"No-o!"

"Do what I tell you," Fast gritted. "Shut it off."

GORMLEY shook his head in terror.

"Go ahead," Smith sneered. "Show him it's a fake so you and I can get down to business."

Gormley brushed his hand over his eyes. This was getting way out of hand. He was just beginning to realize what he had started. But in that instant Albert Fast's hand whipped down and flicked off the switch.

Darkness invaded.

The room vanished. They were no longer there. They were in limbo, in black nothingness. This was the natural habitat of live evil. The odor of evil smote them heavily. For a moment Gormley was faint from it, and from the swirling aura of despair and sadistic triumph.

He tried to cry out. First he couldn't. Then came his whimper of protest.

"No. No!" he wailed.

His cry was directed at the low animal noises that came from across the machine. He stood frozen. Something unseen held him trapped, powerless to move. The animal sounds thickened. It was as if a wild pig had attacked a hyena.

Something thin and sharp swished the black air.

Unseen forms writhed in terrible embrace.

At last he could move. He fell to the floor, groping for the machine switch. Then he found it and flooded the roiling air with light. The living evil bounded back to its lair, faster than sight or sound.

They lay atop one another on the floor. Albert Fast's blunt fingers were deep in the radio station owner's neck. Fast's body was slashed in many places by the thin sharp blade Smith still clutched. Their heads drooped, eyes glazing as he stared.

When at last he could tear his eyes from this horror, he stumbled away from Castongua Mansion, with his machine. He should have warned them. He had tried to. Evil loves evil. *Evil begets evil.* There had been no sudden evidence of evil in those other houses because Gormley was not of himself evil, nor receptive to evil. But when it encountered Fast and Smith, with their insatiable greed and hatred for those who stood in its way. . . .

Back in his frigid loft he shivered and started to light the fire. It was then he noticed the check, Albert Fast's certified check, clutched in his fist. His heart leapt. How he could use it in his research! For the sake of humanity. And yet—

He uttered a cry and dropped it in the stove. He set a match to it, watched it curl and blacken and become nothing. No. He couldn't ever use that money for the sake of humanity. *He* hadn't taken it from Albert Fast. Back in that evil-saturated room, he had not voluntarily taken it and clutched it in his fist as if it meant more than life to him.

No.

Something had put it there.

. . . the white forbidding evil of nature unleashed!

The Lakes of Nai Loodi

BY DONALD F. VIEWEG

I NEVER felt so cold before in my entire life! The icy wind blasted about us, congealing my breath and whipping it back on my face. My fingers and toes throbbed and numbed and finally seemed to drop off. Long fragments of ice breaking off the peaks above us made walking hazardous. We hugged the base of mountain trails fearing for our very lives.

I wondered why in heaven's name I had allowed myself to be talked into going on such a fool's errand. John Denton, for all his genius, was insane to live up here!

As my guide and I traveled between jagged glaciers of virgin ice which frowned down upon puny man's trespassing, I tried to review the events that brought me here. But everything was mixed up; everything pointed to Denton, a man with a brilliant, but unpredictable, unfathomable brain.

It had all started because of his letter. Those few words scrawled on a scrap of paper had expressed such complete terror no man could have ignored his plea for help. To me it seemed incredible that a person of Denton's caliber could have shown such fear—and after five long years of silence

Denton worked at Allied Research for years and no one knew anything about him except that he was a good American and his father was an Arctic explorer who had burned to death in a lava pit.

He was quiet and moody. He grunted out scientific findings that aided greatly in the discovery of the first atomic bomb. Then one day he quit Allied. Phuff!— Just like that. Without a word he disappeared as though from the face of the earth.

Perhaps if Denton hadn't been so unpredictable, we at Allied could have known what was going on inside that brain of his. Perhaps we could have helped him. But with stepped up war production, everyone was too busy to question that faraway look in his eyes. Then that something enveloped him like a magnetic cloud and finally dragged him away. I recall that day: August 14, 1945, the end of World War II.

Five years later he sent that letter, which, for me, was the beginning of the cataclysm of events that followed. I was elected to bring him back; his magnificent brain with its files of atomic information was again needed.

AS I stumbled into the twenty-foot drifts between me and my destination, I recalled the trip. It had been a hectic, exhausting series of planes, boats, mule pack and finally dog sled until I finally arrived at the tiny shack village of Kai Loo. Once there I learned that Denton hadn't settled in Kai Loo as I thought, but far on its outskirts, a distance of some eighty miles due north. He had built a cabin a few hundred yards from a place called the Steaming Lakes.

I turned to my guide who was unpacking for a badly needed night's rest. "Igor," I said, "what are the Steaming Lakes?"

The man's reaction was astonishing. His small eyes widened until I thought they would pop. His mouth dropped as if unhinged. He threw back his grisly head. "Nai Loodi! Nai Loodi!" he cried. "Evil goddess!"

"Oh, come, come, man," I rebuked him. "What are you talking about?"

The guide furiously scooped at the frozen air and revolved one hand around the other. "Smoke, fire come from snow. Hot . . . evil place!"

But even that warning didn't deter me; I had a mission and I had to complete it. The next morning I had to agree to give Igor more money to accompany me. I made what preparations I required and we set off.

Eighty miles in an automobile is a mere two-hour trip, but in dog sled over the most desolate, mountainous terrain I had ever encountered, it turned out to be an agonizing, four-and-a-half day trek. It snowed practically every step of the way—not snow like in New England, but in sheets. It roared down in blinding mass, coating my face and new beard with ice.

And now here I was; nine thousand, two hundred and three miles from home and slowly freezing to death. There was no sign of life about me. Nature here was raw, untamed, king! I was continually afraid of running short of food and my stomach turned over at the thought of raw dog meat; but after the third day, I would have eaten the beasts alive if the need had arisen.

I again wondered why I had allowed myself to be talked into coming after Denton. Why had he ever come here to this frozen wilderness?

I NOTICED that Igor and the dogs didn't show the slightest sign of fatigue. Neither did they seem happy to see the thin column of yellow-gray smoke from the Steaming Lakes in the distance. But I was jubilant! When I started to run, Igor checked me. Distance was deceptive, he told me, especially over the long, snow-packed plateau we were traveling. The smoke ahead looked only a few miles away, but he assured me it was over ten.

Those last miles were heart-breaking drifts, but we finally arrived. I was totally unprepared for what I found. I had never seen such awesome, frozen beauty in my life! The Steaming Lakes region was a masterpiece in ice sculpture—a white, winter carnival of grotesque figures carved by wind and snow. The scene swirled before my eyes and I had to grasp Igor for support.

Right in the center of that frozen wonderland were the lakes I had heard about, the terrifying contradiction of nature, bubbling yellow and sulphurous froth from the bowels of the earth. They seemed to stretch for miles. The heat close up was terrific.

Bordering the lakes was a thick frame of porous blue-orange rock which blistered at the touch and hissed at the snow.

When I finally turned away, I saw, to the right, a cabin which must be Denton's. It was a brown smudge located at the base of a glacier which ended so abruptly I thought some giant had sliced off one end like a loaf of bread.

Igor pointed to it. "I no stay!" His words echoed back in a thousand, piping voices. "I go back now. Castle of Nai Loodi!"

Since it was again beginning to snow, I decided Igor was crazy to even think about returning to Kai Loo. I motioned him to join me, which rather to my surprise and relief, he did. Together we trudged toward the shelter.

IN THOSE five years Denton hadn't changed much. He had grown leaner which gave the impression of increased height and had sprouted a luxurious black beard any Civil War general would have been proud of. His eyes were still the same restless eyes I remembered. But that misty, faraway look had been replaced by a burning, almost knife-like eagerness.

Upon recognizing me, he smiled welcome. He wrung my hand and patted me on the back and forearm.

"Come in. Come in," he said. "You look frozen."

I went inside while Denton talked with my guide. A few minutes later he joined me.

"Igor is going back," he said as he bolted the door.

"Now?" I asked. "After our long trip?"

Denton nodded. "Igor told me he would have made better time, but you slowed him down. Igor never stays here."

From the abrupt way Denton spoke, I knew that that conversation was finished. When we had eaten, Denton sat opposite me across the wooden table.

"You came sooner than I expected," he said. "I'm sorry you went to all the trouble, but I don't need you."

I jumped to my feet. "You don't need me? What do you—"

"Don't get excited," Denton said softly. "I'm sorry, but I shouldn't have written to you. At the time it seemed the thing to do, but now I realize it was foolish. I've got to solve my own problems . . . and in my own way."

"Problems?" I said. "Up here? What problems can you possibly solve in this place?"

Denton clasped his hands upon the table and stared at them for a moment. He glanced at me. "Have you ever heard of Nai Loodi?"

"Nai Loodi?" I said. "That's the name that frightened Igor. That's why he returned."

"Igor is superstitious and that's the cause of Fear," Denton remarked, his face hardening. "I'm not! I believe—you—you noticed the steaming lakes?"

I nodded.

"Beautiful, aren't they?" Denton's voice was almost reverent.

"Yes, but—but aren't they dangerous?"

Denton shrugged. "Perhaps. You can't tell what will happen when you're careless. Sometimes the heat from the lakes makes walking treacherous. You've seen what it's doing to the glacier behind the cabin. Melting her."

So that was the reason for the peculiar shape of that glacier, I thought. I remembered how it looked like a huge loaf of bread, its sides almost perpendicular to the ground. The entire surface was slick and highly reflective.

"Aren't you afraid living so close to that thing?" I asked. "What about an avalanche?"

Denton laughed dryly. "Hardly. She runs parallel to my cabin, not toward it. And she moves at a snail's pace. As soon as she inches ahead, the heat from the lakes melts her down a little more."

"She? You call a glacier 'she'?"

"Yes, why not?"

"A mountain of ice?"

"Not a mountain of ice, but Nai Loodi's!" He actually insisted.

"Nai Loodi's" I said. "Do you mean to say Igor's fear was of a glacier? Why, we traveled over fiercer ones just coming up here!"

But Denton didn't hear me. He had closed his eyes. He was cocking his head as though listening for something. Outside the wind was howling up an all-night gale. The snow, which had only begun as I ar-

rived, was now a driving sheet of gray against the two low windows.

"Going to be a bad one," Denton said softly. "Tonight she'll raise the Devil." He opened his eyes. "No, Igor fears no glaciers but one—this one behind my cabin, the castle of Nai Loodi."

Nai Loodi. That name again—a name that struck terror into the guide, yet Denton said it almost as a prayer.

"Who is Nai Loodi?" I asked.

DENTON'S slow reply was almost inaudible. He was talking more to the wind and the storm than to me. "She's a goddess, a beautiful, bewitching goddess. I saw her only once, but once was enough. I'll never forget her. I know she's a fiend! But I'll never forget her." Denton sighed as though under a great weight.

"Let me tell you about it, Howard. Perhaps you'll understand. After your long trip, I think you're entitled to some explanation. I didn't come here by accident. No. I've been here before. In fact, I was born in Kai Loo. You see, my parents were explorers, but my mother died when I was very young. I loved the trips we used to make, Howard. You'll never realize the thrill of such a dangerous life. We—

"One day I hurt my ankle and was laid up at Kai Loo. After a week of waiting, my father became restless. He couldn't stand doing nothing. He decided to investigate the steaming lakes, a new region the earth had vomited up a few months before. I asked him to wait, but he wouldn't listen. He set off alone, with just two dogs and a light sled.

"Two weeks later he was found crawling in circles thirty miles outside of Kai Loo. It was Igor who carried him to my cabin. When we removed his clothing and saw his body, we knew there was nothing we could do. He was blind! His hair was snow white. He was almost crazed with fever, and in his delirium he raved about a woman with red hair walking on fire. He died that night."

Denton looked up. "Do you know what killed him?" he cried. "Do you think he froze to death? Do you?"

Denton frightened me. His eyes burned into mine until I had to turn away. He seized me by the shoulder and twisted me about.

"My father died of multiple, third-degree burns! He was a walking dead mass of burnt flesh!"

I shook my head. I couldn't believe it. Was this the magnificent brain I came to bring back to civilization? I tried to comfort him but it didn't work. I waited. I waited until his breathing returned to normal. I watched him stroke his temples with the side of his thumbs, a habit I had noticed back at Allied. It seemed to relax him. He blinked and his eyes seemed to focus.

"I buried my father in the ice he loved," he continued hoarsely. "Igor said he must have fallen into the steaming lakes. You never knew my father, Howard, but he was incapable of such carelessness. He knew and recognized danger. He had the greatest respect for it. He couldn't have fallen into the steaming lakes!

"I was convinced of that, but I wanted proof. As soon as I could walk, I packed my gear. Igor at first refused to accompany me, but out of respect to my father, he gave in.

"If I hadn't been so thoroughly hateful of that place, Howard, I would have found it beautiful—as you perhaps did. But all I could see was evil, the white, forbidden evil of nature unleashed. The filthy yellow smoke from the open pits beckoned like crawling fingers of Hell.

"Igor was petrified. Ghosts and demons inhabited the boiling pits. The queen of sin and evil, Nai Loodi, lived within that curiously shaped glacier. I scoffed at his superstitions: the myth of a virgin goddess of passion was something out of the books of the Northlands, a carry-over from the Viking age of Eric the Red.

"UNDER a film of powder snow we found my father's trail. It was broken by snows upon snows, but we were able to follow it. My father had gone close to the lakes, Howard, but we picked up a second trail returning. The steps were spaced far apart, as though my father had been running. A few feet from the base of the bread loaf glacier of Nai Loodi his footprints stopped. From all appearances he had vanished into a wall of ice.

"Igor and I searched for other footprints and finally located them fifty feet away, only this time the trail was bloody. Long streaks of charred fur and flesh stained the ice. The snow was caked red. Do you realize what that meant? My father had fallen into a pit of boiling lava which didn't exist! There was nothing there but a hundred-foot wall of ice!"

After a pause in which Denton fought to restrain himself, he continued. "I felt sick, Howard, sick and hopeless. There was nothing I could do. Nothing. I was completely beaten in spirit. I told Igor to pack.

"While he made ready, I stared at the base of that glacier that had swallowed up my father then spat him up, black and half dead. I was grief-stricken, Howard, but I was rational. What happened then wasn't my imagination. What I'm going to tell you now I actually saw and heard.

"I was looking at those bloody tracks when a breeze swirled some powder snow into my eyes, momentarily blinding me. As I wiped my face I thought I heard something like the tinkle of tiny silver bells. It made my scalp prickle. I looked up. There was nothing. Then I heard it again, this time behind me. It sounded like laughter.

"I spun around and saw the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. She was tall and slim. Her mature, semi-nude body was a masterpiece carved in blue-white marble. Her features were incredibly young, haloed by flaming hair which swirled about her arms and shoulders as though buoyant. Her eyes were red as flame and her brows were arched lines, like wings. She was smiling at me in a way that—that seemed indecent yet I couldn't turn away.

"When she held out her arms to invite me to her breast, I couldn't resist. Everything had gone crazy. The yellow smoke from the sulphur pits began to envelop her like a filthy hand and I started to run. I had to save her. She drifted further back toward the lakes and I ran faster, my name, 'Denton! Denton!' screaming in my ears.

"I remember shouting, 'Wait! Wait!', then something hit me. A tremendous weight smothered me into the snow and everything went black. When I regained my senses, Igor was shaking me. He had saved my life, because if I had run two feet more I would have been broiled alive.

"I stood up and searched the lakes and for an instant I again saw the red hair and the blue-white body of Nai Loodi. My ears echoed to her laughter . . . and she was gone.

"Do you understand now why I came back?" Denton asked, his voice trembling. "Do you? I've got to find out if she was real or just a vision caused by Igor's tales. I've got to! She's haunted me long enough!" Denton buried his head in his hands and was still.

FRANKLY, I didn't know what to think after that. Denton's tale—if it was a tale—left me trembling. It was fantastic, and yet—I didn't know what to think. I was almost afraid to glance at the dark corners of the cabin for fear of finding— Oh, perhaps you gentlemen think it was silly of me, but there, in that weird land, I was ready to believe anything. I fumbled for a match and lit my pipe. I had to think and I couldn't. The wind outside was moaning like shackled fiends and every so often the very earth beneath seemed to shake.

Suddenly I heard a crash like a million claps of thunder! The cabin reeled before my eyes. Books flew down from their shelves, dishes rattled and splintered on the floor, and chairs slid across the room as though alive. I clutched at the edge of the table in panic.

"Denton!"

Denton looked at me, half amused. "It's Nai Loodi," he said above the rumbling. He smiled and stood up. "According to Igor, she's awakening!"

More dishes smashed then the rumbling subsided. The thunder softened and finally ceased and the wind again howled. I eased into my chair.

"W-What was it, John?" I asked. "Earthquake?"

He scowled. "No. Perhaps I should have warned you. It's the glacier moving ahead to be melted down another foot." He waved his hand with an air of finality. "Don't worry, you're safe."

SAFE, the man said. I almost laughed with hysteria. How could he remain so calm with that—that *thing* outside his door?

Was he human? Had the long months of loneliness deranged him? Nothing seemed right up here. Then I had another thought: Perhaps I was being too severe in my judgment. It seemed that ever since I left the security of friends and familiar surroundings I was in a continuous state of fright. Here I had no mental references. Everything was strange and different, horribly distorted. And Denton's story of a goddess with red eyes and blue skin hadn't helped things any.

"What do you hope to prove up here?" I asked finally.

"Prove?" Denton said. He laughed ironically. "That's the odd part; I—I really don't know. I came back because I felt I had to. All during the war when I was working for Allied I felt like something was trying to get into me to drag me away. I fought it, but when the war ended, I had no more resistance. I left the way I did because there would have been too much explanation."

"But you haven't been here for five years?" I said incredulously.

"No," he replied. "I traveled. I visited every place I could, but it didn't help. I began dreaming of Nai Loodi, the way I saw her when I was a boy. She called to me; finally I answered.

"After two months of this place, I began to think I was insane for coming here. That's when I wrote to you. But I don't need you now because I know I'm not insane. You heard the glacier. You felt the earth shudder. Nai Loodi is coming, you hear me! She's coming!"

I couldn't believe those bizarre words came from the Denton I knew and admired. I tried to persuade him to listen to reason, but he shook his head.

"No," he snapped. "I've got to see her once more. But I'll make you a deal. If she's merely fancy as you say, I'll return. Okay?"

That was fine with me. I knew I practically had him back at Allied.

"But John—?"

"Huh?"

"W—What if she's real?" The words came out automatically; I didn't even realize the thought!

Denton sighed in resignation. "If she's real, there's not much I can do. I couldn't refuse her before. How can I expect to now, unless—" He shuddered as though chilled.

"Unless what?"

"N-Nothing. I don't know if—" He stood up and shook himself. "This is getting morbid. Come on, I'll fix you some coffee before turning in."

THE first thing to greet me the next morning was the odor of fresh coffee and fried bacon. Denton looked like he had been awake for hours. His eyes were clear—hardly what I expected from last night.

He caught me watching him. "Hello! You're finally awake. I was afraid you wouldn't sleep at all with all that noise last night. The glacier was making a devilish sound."

Noise? I hadn't heard a thing all night. "I was tired," I told him as I looked about. Two oil lamps were still burning. "Isn't it day, yet?" I asked.

Denton nodded. "Twelve noon, or thereabouts." He followed my glance to the oil lamps. "Oh, them— It snowed last night, remember? The windows are blocked. After breakfast we'll have to tunnel out."

When I climbed out of my bunk I realized that the interior of the cabin was freezing. I dressed, chattering. "You-you look mighty chipper this morning," I said.

He nodded his head and smiled as though enjoying a secret joke. "I feel good today. Things seem different! Talking must have helped. Besides, I had a dream. I dreamed everything would be all right."

I was delighted by this remarkable change in his attitude. "Then you'll come back with me?" I said hopefully.

"I might consider it. Now sit down and eat."

We ate in silence. When we had finished and had cleared the table, Denton sat opposite me.

"I'm glad you came, Howard," he said. "You brought a touch of civilization or something I seemed to have forgotten. It's done me good."

Denton got up and walked to the opposite side of the cabin. He picked up his furs and snowshoes and sat on the bunk. "Let's dig our way out of this deep freeze," he said.

I followed his example and struggled

into my sealskin boots, furs and windbreaker.

"Bundle up," Denton called over his shoulder. He removed the wooden bar locking the door. "It's going to be crystal cold out there. Bring your goggles, snow shoes too."

I gathered my equipment and joined him at the door which had jammed. Together we jerked it open and gazed into a solid wall of snow.

WITH a small bladed shovel, Denton hacked at it. "It's still soft," he said. "We'll be out in a minute." He chopped and scooped until he had dug a two-foot tunnel which rose obliquely toward light. As he broke through, part of the tunnel caved in and engulfed him. He struggled to his feet and brushed himself off.

"Pass up my shoes," he said. He fastened them on and crawled out the hole, then I followed. Denton reached down and pulled me into the light.

Spread before me was a binding white world which I saw only an instant before everything went black. My eyes stabbed with pain.

"You can get snow blinded with tricks like that," Denton warned. "Put on your goggles!"

As my eyes grew accustomed to this stark, white, misty world spread before me, Denton called my attention to the cabin. It was covered by a drift fifteen feet high on its south side while its other three sides were practically bare of snow.

"That's the wind for you," Denton remarked. "Usually the drifts form on the north side."

I looked about in infant wonder. The steaming lakes seemed less ominous with the swirling mist spread over them and their clean blanket of snow; but as we walked closer I saw the rocks and lava stained in brilliant hues of red, blue, gray, yellow and orange. Slashes of vermilion, topaz and garnet formed the giant palette of an insane artist's nightmare. In the center of the lakes were streams of blue-green flame spurting into the air only to fall back in momentary defeat.

Denton nudged me. "We're lucky the storm did come from the north," he said.

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"The glacier blocked off most of the snow. We don't need our shoes after all."

I was thankful for that. For me, snowshoes were bulky, cumbersome things that made me waddle like a duck. As I was about to unfasten the strap to my second shoe, Denton jerked me to my feet.

"Howard, look!" he shouted. He pointed toward Nai Loodi's glacier which was vaguely outlined in the lifting fog. "Look at her! Look!"

For fully a minute I stared in fascination. What tremendous force could have done it? What power on earth could have split a mountain of crystal ice down its center like an orange?

The bread loaf glacier of Nai Loodi was now two half loaves, separated by at least fifty feet of space.

Denton ran toward it. Within a few seconds he had vanished into the mists. I snapped the remaining strap to my snowshoe and ran after him, sinking deep into the snow with each exaggerated step.

When I finally overtook him, it was only because he had stopped. Three feet before him, where yesterday a solid glacier had stood, was a bottomless pit fifty yards wide.

"It's amazing!" Denton whispered in admiration. "Last night she split open and look what she was resting on—absolutely nothing!"

Denton was right; it *was* amazing. What's more, it was uncanny, unnatural. I didn't know why, but I was trembling. The pale blue fog steadily rising from the chasm rolled like waves toward us. It crawled like slime over the edge of the pit and coiled about our feet, protesting in angry little puffs when we moved.

I seized Denton by the arm and jerked him back. "Don't get so close!" I warned.

Denton pulled away. His eyes were wide with excitement. "Don't stop me now, Howard. I know what I'm doing."

"Please, John, get back!" I begged. "You don't know how deep that thing is."

"Don't you worry, I won't fall," came the confident reply. "I'm an explorer, Howard, and this calls for exploration."

"You're not going to climb down there, John! Don't be foolish! One false step and—"

He laughed at my caution. "Ha! Me slip? Why, I was born on ice."

I WAS still protesting when Denton began his insane descent into the pit. On my hands and knees I watched him as the blue haze swallowed him up, and he was gone. As if from far below I heard him grunt and groan. Suddenly the earth trembled!

I leaped back! The glacier of Nai Loodi swayed crazily.

Denton's scream pierced the rumbling, and a second later I heard the thud of his body as it hit.

"Denton! Denton!" I screamed. "Denton!" My cries echoed back, mocking me. With the awful silence, I realized that I was alone—alone in a horrible, frozen graveyard with eighty treacherous miles between me and life.

"Denton! DENTON!" I yelled in mounting panic.

His voice came to me out of the mists. "Well, I'll be damned. I'll be double damned!"

Thank heaven he was still alive! I called into the murky cloud separating us. "Are you all right?"

"This is amazing!" Denton said in awe. He seemed only a few feet below me, yet I couldn't see him.

"Where are you, John?"

"Hell's bells, Howard. Stop that silly yelling. Of course I'm all right."

"What—What happened?" I asked timidly.

"I lost my footing, that's all."

I wondered how he could sound so calm when he had narrowly missed falling to his death. I leaned over the edge of the pit. "How far down are you?"

He answered as though surprised. "Can't you see me? I'm only fifteen feet below. Come down and look at this."

I shuddered and stepped back from the edge. That bump on the head must have made him delirious if he thought I was going to climb down into that—that place. Why, I couldn't even see a foot ahead of me.

"I—I better wait up here," I told him.

"Dammit, Howard. Don't be an ass!" Denton yelled. "Nothing down here will harm you."

I crawled closer to the edge, but something warned me to stay where I was. Confused pictures kept flashing through my brain.

"But—But if I go down, how will we get out?" I asked.

A violent flood of curses greeted me from below. Then silence. I could hear a muffled scraping sound and my own breathing.

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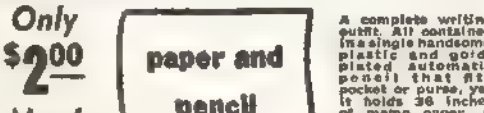

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"Howard!" Denton called as though making an intense effor: to keep his voice steady. "Howard, did—did you ever—walk on air?"

That bump on the head had hurt him. "Please come up," I begged. "You're seeing things."

Denton's immediate reply was a low and bitter laugh. "You're wrong, Howard," he said finally. "That's the rub; I'm *not* seeing things. I tell you the floor down here is invisible! There's nothing under me!"

Now I knew I'd have to go after him. Invisible floors? I stretched out on my stomach and swung my feet over the edge. I found a foothold and eased down into the thinning mists. The whole thing was like moving in a nightmare where one false step meant violent death.

"Easy," Denton instructed from below. "Over to the left."

I INCHED over and the next thing I knew I was tumbling through space. I didn't even have time to scream when I hit bottom and everything went black. When I came to, I heard Denton laughing over me.

"What the devil's so funny?" I said.

"Oh, you're not hurt. Give me your hand." He pulled me to my feet and brushed me off. I was beginning to see clearer through the haze.

"Look up and see how far you fell," Denton said.

I did, and I couldn't believe my eyes: I could see the top as clear as day!

"Now look below you," Denton said. "Better take a deep breath first."

I should have heeded his warning, because when I looked down I was sick. I needed to vomit. I clutched out for support.

Denton steadied me. "Take it easy," he said, laughing. "That's the way it affected me at first. You'll get used to it."

I hung on for my life. Get used to it, he said! Was it possible for a human being to get accustomed to walking on nothing—absolutely nothing?

"Look, it's solid enough," Denton assured me. He stamped his foot. "Go ahead, try it yourself."

Still holding his arm, I pounded my foot. The floor—or whatever it was—was as

solid as steel. Courage seeped back and I started to jump up and down, experiencing the most peculiar sensation I had ever known. I felt like a kid with a new toy. I was enjoying the sensation when a huge chunk of ice crashed down and missed us by inches. I looked up in horror to see long slabs of ice peeling in great waves from the walls of the pit. Denton jerked me off my feet.

"Stop it, Howard! Stop it!" he cried. "You'll bury us. Vibrations! The whole wall is crumbling!"

We clung together, ready to spring out of the path of falling ice, but the cliff stopped its trembling. We both sighed in relief.

"We're treading on unknown ground," Denton said, his face as white as mine must have been. "Walk softly'

It seemed incredible that the slight vibration of my step had almost toppled an entire glacier down upon us. Needless to say, I barely lifted my feet after that.

I watched curiously as Denton dropped to his knees and crawled around. He pulled off his thick gloves and rubbed his bare fingers over the invisible surface. He tasted them and made a wry face.

"Have you ever seen invisible plate glass?" he asked, pre-occupied.

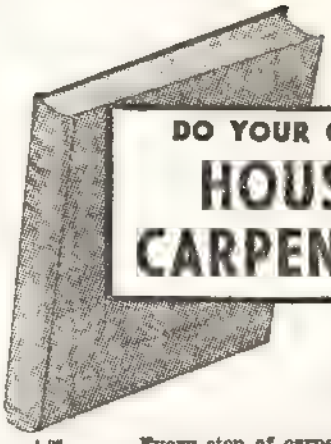
Glass? Certainly Denton didn't think—

"No, it's not glass," Denton said, as though reading my thoughts. He rose to his feet and pulled on his gloves. "It's ice—invisible ice. The wind and snow of last night's storm polished and lapped it almost perfectly smooth . . . But—but it's ice, all right. Go ahead, feel it."

I touched the invisible floor with my naked fingers and felt a film of water form beneath them. I tasted my fingers. It *was* ice!

"It's smooth and slightly convex so it absorbs all light," Denton exclaimed. "That's why we can't see it." He sniffed at the air. "Steam seems to be lifting." He walked toward the almost perpendicular wall. "It's getting warmer. Come on, Howard, let's climb out of here before the heat from the lakes melts this stuff and we find ourselves swimming."

That was easy for him to say, but how? Now that the fog had almost cleared I saw a vertical wall of ice completely surround-



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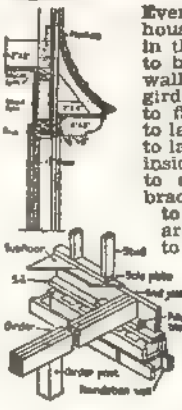

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ing us. Exit seemed impossible. Already the walls were slick and moist from the mounting heat of the Steaming Lakes.

SUDDENLY I stopped! It was barely audible at first, just within the range of hearing. A few seconds later I heard it clear and ringing: feminine laughter! It was musical like—the tinkling of silver bells! Denton's very words!

I looked up. At the edge of the pit twelve feet above Denton's bobbing head stood a half clothed woman with her arms stretched to the sky and her head flung back. Her body was curved and graceful, a figure of incredible symmetry and beauty. Flaming coils of red hair swirled about her head and shoulders to the lilting rhythm of the winds above.

She was looking down at me and her eyes were tender and overflowing with love. She smiled and I shuddered in anticipation. I knew now why Denton had come back. I understood why he had been haunted all those years. I knew, I yearned, I desired. Nai Loodi of the Lakes! Nai Loodi, Daughter of Pleasures.

But Denton didn't know. He was making so much noise hacking footholds in the ice with his knife, he couldn't see her. I called to him.

He started. When he turned and saw me, he spun around and looked up. His reaction was amazing! Instead of being happy, he seemed repelled. He seemed to strain every fibre of his being to tear his attention away. He flung himself forward on the ice.

"Close your eyes!" he screamed.

Even if I had wanted to, I couldn't move a muscle. I felt clamped in the jaws of awe. My brain whirled. I was soaring in ecstasy among the stars. "Close your eyes," I heard again, but as though from a great distance. "Don't look at her!"

Denton's second warning had a miraculous effect. It was as if a veil had been lifted from my reason, a door had opened, a page had been turned—whatever the allusion—I awoke as though from a dream. I could again move! I could again think!

Then I knew why. Nai Loodi was no longer concerned with me; her attention was on Denton. She seemed to be command-

ing him to look at her. When he didn't obey, her eyes flared red. Her crimson lips pulled away from her teeth in a hideous snarl.

I understood it all now: the glacier, the pit, the ice—it was a trap, a glorified trap! I ran to Denton's side as he struggled to his feet, still shielding his face with his arm.

"Don't look at her eyes," he shouted.

I sneaked a glance, but Nai Loodi wasn't there above us. When I looked around I saw her in the pit with us. I didn't know how she got there—everything was confused —but she was with us in the pit. She made no attempt to come closer, but stood a good twenty feet away smiling. She was a fiend!

"We got to get out!" Denton cried. "Look for a place!"

We searched for an opening, but the entire wall was now smooth as glass. The top seemed miles over our heads.

Denton cupped his hands together. "Climb up on my shoulders! Hurry man. Hurry!"

He lifted me and my fingers were only inches from the top when everything started swaying. In the instant before I fell, I saw Nai Loodi stamping the ice floor which was now visible and rapidly taking on a bluish hue. The entire surface was rolling crazily, like a million plucked harp strings. Huge cracks slit across in lightning flash patterns.

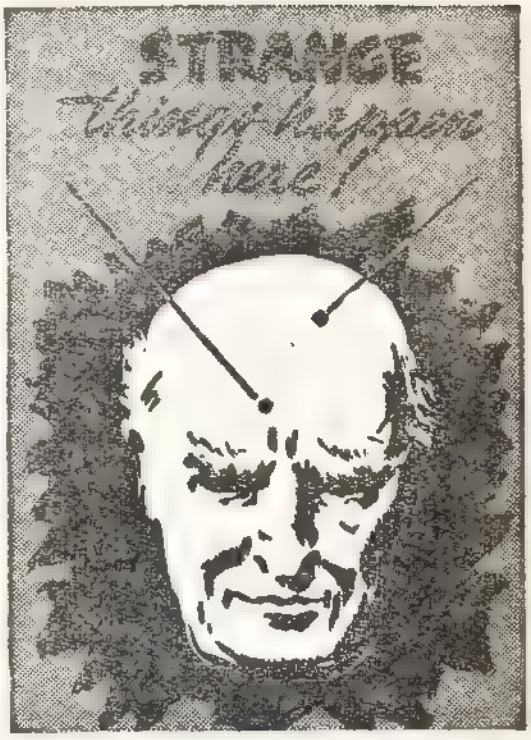
"She's destroying it with vibrations!" I yelled.

DENTON again lifted me, but dropped me a second time as he lost his balance on the swelling ice. Then a new danger arose; the rhythmic vibrations began loosening the ice wall above us. Great chunks of ice dropped off. It thundered down into the pit. More and more followed like waves.

"That's the way out!" Denton said above the roar. "When part of the wall falls. It will be rough going, but—but we can make it!" He looked around. He pointed to the left.

"There it is! Get out, Howard. Get out!" He shoved me savagely.

I ran to the shattered wall and climbed like mad. Half way up I realized that Denton wasn't behind me. I turned and saw him running toward Nai Loodi, skidding



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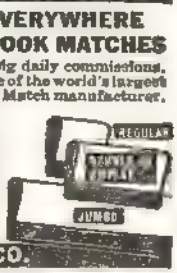

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and slipping on the rolling, buckling surface. All around him, from between huge cracks, licked tongues of blue flame.

"Denton! Come back!" I called in blind panic.

"Get out. You fool, get out!"

I was almost to the top when a tremendous roar shook the air. I turned and saw the entire right side of the pit collapsing into a pool of blue-white flame.

But still Denton slipped toward Nai Loodi. She saw him and stopped her rhythmic vibration. She held out her arms to welcome him, and in that brief moment I reached the top. I was safe. But Denton . . .

I watched, horrified at the scene below. Three quarters of the blue ice floor melted into the pool of blue, stinking sulphurous flame. If Denton didn't get out now, he never would.

I screamed his name. He turned, and when he saw me out of the pit, he shot toward the one remaining wall. I looked at Nai Loodi. I had never seen such hate in a person's eyes. She snarled like an animal and her arched brows almost joined together. Instead of pursuing Denton, she waited until he was almost to the wall below me, then she stamped her little foot and the floor beneath him collapsed into flame.

"Father in heaven!"

I ran to the edge and screamed Denton's name. But he was gone . . . Denton . . . He had given his life to save mine. I watched as the blue flames licked higher and higher, finally obscuring Nai Loodi's triumphant smile I watched until my eyes blurred. My body felt like a great weight I couldn't seem to carry. I couldn't even move back from the edge when I heard the rumblings of the glacier as it crept forward to cover three-quarters of the gorge, and the earth trembled in protest. Denton . . . Denton was gone. . . .

IT SEEMED hours that I stared into the inferno. I heard my name echoing again and again in mocking reverberation.

A great man had given his life—and for me.

Then I did hear my name! It was cried soft and feeble, but it was in Denton's voice! I crawled closer. Between leaping

fingers of flame I saw him below me clinging to the jagged side of the pit. He hadn't fallen!

The heat was unbearable. I stretched on my stomach and held out my burned hands. Denton clutched them and, as I dragged him up, his eyes stared wide and thankful. I carried him some feet away from the blistering hell and fell exhausted to the cool snow.

I don't know how long it was before I opened my eyes. I turned to Denton and examined him quickly. He was badly burned. His face and clothes were black with caked blood. After some trouble, I managed to lift him to my shoulders. I carried him toward his cabin as the glacier of Nai Loodi slid forward and completely sealed the fiery pit.

It was many hours before he began to show signs of regaining consciousness, and I knew if I didn't get him back to civilization the world would mourn for a great man. When he moaned, I stopped packing and rushed to his bunk.

He called out for me in a voice that seemed lost and helpless.

"I'm here, John," I told him. "You're safe with me."

He tried to sit up. "Lie still," I said. "Don't disturb the bandages."

He sighed and asked for water.

I held a cup to his lips. "Drink it slowly," I said. "A little at a time."

When he again lay back, he smiled. His burnt lips split more and he winced in pain. "I—I beat her, Howard," he said.

I stroked his brow. "Yes, I know."

"I beat her. Yes, I beat her!"

I tried to quiet him. "Sleep, John. Get your strength."

"But I beat her!" He clutched my hand and I cried in pain. "She's no goddess, Howard. She's— She's—" He again lost consciousness and slept.

I didn't dare risk staying there without the proper medicants for both of us. When Denton was a little stronger, I made the perilous trip back. You gentlemen know the rest of the story. . . .

DR. HOWARD THORNDYKE looked about the large room. His eyes rested on each face. The Board of Directors of

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Allied Research stared back. Most of the men were perspiring; all of them were breathing heavily. Finally Dr. Thorndyke faced the fat, balding man sitting at the head of the long, mahogany table.

"Well, Mr. Bateman—you asked for Denton's story. Now you have it. You greeted our plane. You went to the hospital."

The head of the Board of Directors wiped his brow. He slowly drummed the polished surface of the table with his fingers. The slight noise echoed through the room. He shook his head from side to side.

"Howard—it's fantastic! You really can't expect me to—"

"Fantastic, be damned!" shouted Dr. Thorndyke. "That's Denton's story! That's what took him away and that's why he's like he is now—half dead. I know—I know it's incredible, but it's the truth! I saw Nai Loodi! I heard her rotten laughter!"

Mr. Bateman held his hands before him as if to ward off the verbal attack. "I'm very sorry, Howard. Truly I am, but—"

He was interrupted by the jangling telephone before him. He picked it up, spoke into it and turned to Dr. Thorndyke.

"It's for you. It's from the hospital."

Dr. Thorndyke took the 'phone in his bandaged hands. He spoke softly into it for a minute, then his voice raised in pitch. "What?" he shouted. He listened some more, all the while his eyes widening until they were almost round. Perspiration poured down his red face. Finally he dropped the phone into its cradle and fell into a chair. He looked at Bateman.

"That was Vancroft," he said in a whisper. "It's happened . . ." After a pause, he continued. His voice was choked.

"Vancroft was with him. He said Denton awoke from a fitful sleep and sat up. He held out his arms in the dark and called some foreign name. Vancroft couldn't understand it. He said that as he tried to quiet Denton, he thought he saw a red-headed woman enter the room. She glided right past without seeing him and stopped at Denton's bed. She leaned over and kissed Denton on the lips. He smiled, Vancroft said, and fell back to the pillow—dead."

The Eyrie

(*Continued from page 7*)

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Picking up the May issue of W. T. I was immediately struck with the terrific art work done on the cover by Virgil Finlay. It is covers like these, and the terrific stories inside, that make me an ardent follower of W. T.

To begin with, let me say that on the whole, all the May stories were exceptionally fine. Oddly enough, the story that rated with me as first, was the last story in the issue. That was "Father's Vampire" by Alvin Taylor and Len J. Moffatt.

Keep up the good work,

Robert Fazio,
Glendale, New York

WE FEEL that we cannot take up much more space with Lovecraft material, but here are two letters to be added to the many we published in our last issue. They seemed to us interesting enough to be carried over:

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

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in its pages, and I am happy to see Clark Ashton Smith represented in the March issue. Could you not reprint his "The Saturnienne," and "Dominion"?—the peak of perfection in weird verse.

You will undoubtedly receive many letters from old readers telling Mr. Robert Paulive of New York about the Necronomicon and the so-called Cthulhu myth. Is it not about time for WEIRD TALES *to print the truth about one of the greatest myths fostered in modern times? namely, that the Necronomicon and all that it implies is merely a product of H. P. Lovecraft's fertile imagination? Or don't you dare?*

You see, I have seen and handled a copy of the Necronomicon! *It was in 1927 in, of all places, Honolulu. It was "owned" by a dubious Levantine character whom I met under equivocal circumstances. He permitted me to examine it for nearly half an hour. The volume was in quarto, and had obviously been rebound many times, the current binding of blackish green leather being cracked and broken. It ran to something over 400 pages, but the contents were in deplorable condition. Many sheets were missing, many mutilated, and all were brittle with age. They were scrawled over with comments in many languages. Enough remained of the title page to show that the volume was printed in London in 1632. I take it to have been one of a very small private edition, probably adapted from Wormius (as H. P. L. calls him). The book was poorly printed in heavy black letter, and was in Latin. Though not very fluent in that language, I could make out enough to convince me that it was the real thing. The Necronomicon, as near as I could tell in the short time it was in my hands, appears to be divided into three main sections: 1. A history of magic and demonolatry on this planet; 2. A symposium of relations between the earth and other spheres and dimensions, such as "Yuggoth," and 3. A terrible miscellany and collection of spells, formulae, and incantations.*

I know perfectly well that H. P. L. was quite familiar with the Necronomicon, and no doubt owned a copy, or had access to one. I particularly looked for the original of one of his direct quotations from it, and found it in Section 2:

"Mortuus non credite illud quin latet
aeterno
Quum per saecula mira Mors etiam pereat."

That is as close as I can get to remembering the Latin after all these years. Well, the Levantine offered it to me for $300. He obviously wanted to get rid of it for some reason, but would not come below that price, which was cheap enough in all conscience. But I was broke in those days. I implored him to hold it for a week, and spent the time begging, borrowing, and stealing until I had made up the sum. But my man did not keep the appointment, and I never saw him again. Some time afterwards I learned that he had sailed hurriedly for China a few days after I met him.

Yes, the Necronomicon does *exist . . . and the implications stemming from its existence have often cost me my sleep at night. . . .*

My best wishes for the continued success to WEIRD TALES, *which I shall continue reading so long as you publish it. Should you publish this letter in the "Eyrie" please withhold my name and address, for a good many reasons, some of them—well, psychical. Neither do I wish to be deluged by letters from people to whom I can give no more information than I have given above.*

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Sincerely yours,
"An Old Reader,"
Bountiful, Utah.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Though a regular reader of WEIRD TALES, *it is seldom that I look at The Eyrie. However, I did happen to notice the inquiry by R. Paulive, published in the March issue. While on the subject of THE NECRONOMICON—Manly Wellman told me once that one time in New York he happened to notice a small, dingy second-hand bookshop located in the cellar of an old, decrepit building. Being a book-collector and not being in a hurry at the moment, he went down the rickety stairs and into the place—dim, musty and vaguely forbidding in its atmosphere. Old volumes of no possible interest to anyone were jumbled on shelves and standing on the floor in disorderly heaps. A glance told him that nothing was there that he wanted, and he was about to leave, when an old crone appeared, and asked "Was there something you wanted?" Feeling obliged to have some justification for being in the shop, he said, "Have you a copy of THE NECRONOMICON?" To Manly's consternation, she answered, "Certainly," and hobbled over to the dimmest and dustiest corner of the room and began pawing along shelf-backs. After a few moments, during which Manly didn't know whether to wait or to run, she said "Humph! It was here just a few days ago, but it must have been sold."*

It is a good story, and incidentally get Manly to do some more John Thunstone stories for you—and us, his readers.

J. H. Stewart, Jr.,
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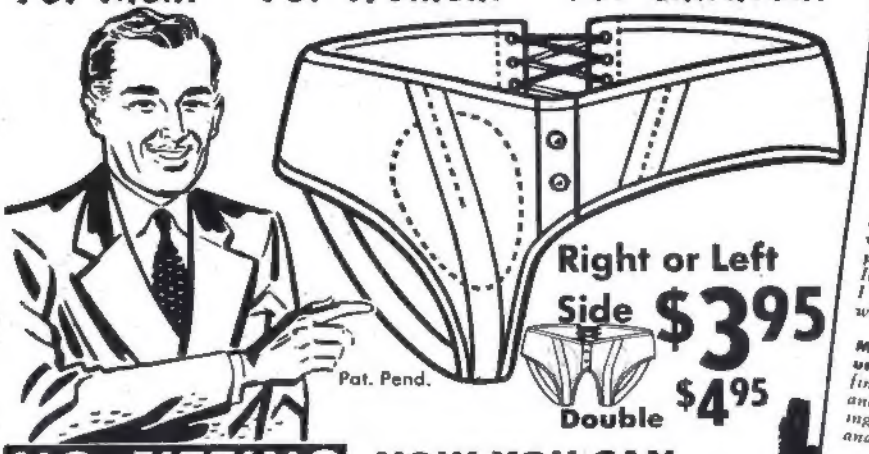

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Right Side	☐ $3.95	Measure around lowest part of my abdomen is
Left Side	☐ $3.95	
Double	☐ $4.95	.....INCHES.

We Prepay Postage Except on C.O.D.'s

Note: Be sure to give size and side when ordering

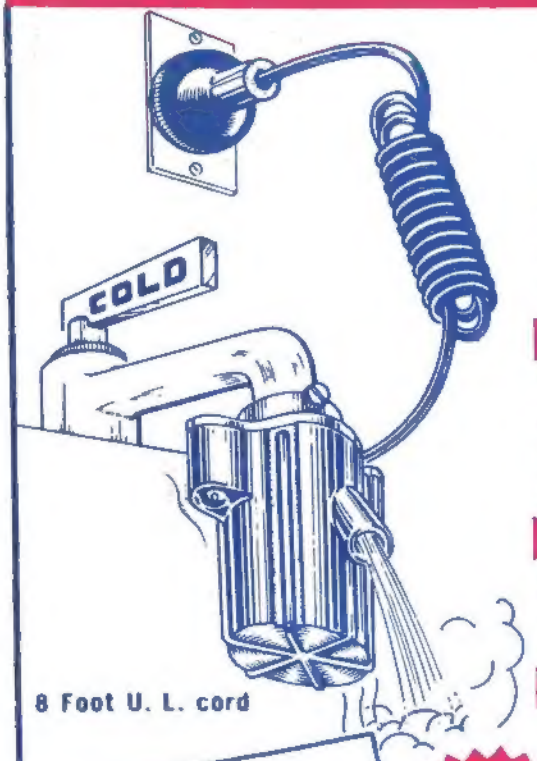
Enclosed is: ☐ Money Order ☐ Check for $..... ☐ Send C. O. D.

Name.....

Address.....

City and State.....

Running HOT WATER -in a Jiffy! from any COLD WATER FAUCET



8 Foot U. L. cord

It is almost too good to be true! You just must see for yourself the steaming hot water running continuously from a COLD WATER FAUCET. With this dependable JET INSTANT HOT WATER HEATER—you can get water from Lukewarm to Real Hot—when you want it! No WAITING—No FUSSING WITH FIRES or BOILERS—No TANKS or GAUGES to watch!

JUST ATTACH AND TURN FAUCET TO REGULATE TEMPERATURE!

A turn of the faucet gives you water of ANY DESIRED TEMPERATURE from Lukewarm to HOT! No further adjustments are necessary. Attaches itself to most any faucet easily—without the need of tools—just turn three set screws to hold firmly in place. No diagrams or special charts needed. ANYONE CAN ATTACH IT TO A COLD WATER FAUCET!

JET INSTANT HOT WATER HEATER FILLS A GREAT NEED!

A long and urgent need is now easily fulfilled. You can get hot water ANYWHERE! in kitchen, basement, garage, summer cottage or cabin, camp, office, factory—on the farm or barn wherever a cold water faucet and an electrical outlet are handy!

FULLY GUARANTEED — 10-DAY MONEY BACK GUARANTEE!

The JET INSTANT HOT WATER HEATER is fully covered by factory guarantee against defects in workmanship and material. Should the JET INSTANT HOT WATER HEATER fail to give HOT WATER *instantly*, return for full refund.

✓Check THESE ADVANTAGES

- No Moving Parts to Wear Out.
- Operates on AC or DC current.
- Constructed of Chrome Steel and Porcelain.
- Measures 2¾" x3¾". Stores away easily.
- Fits any Standard sized faucet.
- Comes with 8 Ft. U. L. Approved cord.
- Attaches quickly — without tools.
- Costs only few cents to operate.
- Full Factory Guarantee against defects.
- Money Back Guarantee if JET does not deliver hot water instantly.

ONLY $4.98

SEND NO MONEY! Do Not Delay — No longer need you wish and hope for the convenience of HOT WATER —when you want it. For only $4.98 you can enjoy the benefits and *instant* use of HOT WATER. No expensive equipment or installation is necessary. SEND YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS. Enclose $4.98 and we will ship your JET prepaid or if you prefer, pay postman on delivery plus few cents postage and C.O.D. Charges.

SUCCESS PRODUCTS, 246 Roebling St., Dept. 507, Brooklyn 11, N. Y.

☐ Send JET INSTANT HOT WATER HEATER. I enclose $5.00.

☐ I enclose $1.00 deposit. I will pay Postman balance on delivery, $3.98 plus postal charges.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY ..... ZONE ..... STATE .....

10 DAY MONEY BACK GUARANTEE!